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PRODUCING A ‘SPACE OF DIGNITY’. KNITTING TOGETHER  
SPACE AND DIGNITY IN THE EZLN REBELLION IN MEXICO

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the  
Graduate School-New Brunswick  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Geography

written under the direction of

Neil Smith

and approved by

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New Brunswick, New Jersey

January, 2008

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Producing a ‘Space of Dignity’. Knitting together Space and Dignity in the

EZLN Rebellion in Mexico

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I explore the production of new political, cultural and economic spaces (including the Zapatista Rebel Territory, Rebel Autonomous Municipalities, Caracoles and Juntas) constructed by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), an indigenous rebellion in the Mexican state of Chiapas that rose up against the government on January 1, 1994. These spaces are articulated as a symbol of and material basis for sustaining the long-term resistance begun by the EZLN to demand a ‘space of dignity’ for the indigenous peoples.

Based on the major stages in the EZLN’s political practice from 1994 to 2003 —the Declarations of the Lacandona Jungle, the declaration of the Zapatista Rebel Territory, and current phase of Good Government— I discuss further how a ‘space of dignity’ can be conceptually defined, how it can be socially produced, and how it can be a means for social transformation.

My approach to the Zapatista struggle sheds a light not only on the resulting relationships between space, dignity and resistance, but it looks forward to the meaning

these concepts and relationships have for understanding the nature of the Zapatista rebellion and the contribution of this experience within the larger context of the production of space in capitalism.

I conclude that the notion of a ‘space of dignity’ can provide an abstract framework to reflect on the possibilities for thinking of space as a means for revolutionary transformation, namely for organized resistance against neoliberal globalization. And that for the Zapatista rebellion, the practical meaning of this ultimate goal has resulted in the re-signification of the notion of dignity —both as a cultural and geographical framework— from which to think and construct spaces for defending autonomy and territory for the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

This research is focused around a case study using qualitative research methodologies, combining ethnographic and archival sources with extensive fieldwork, conducted in 2002 and 2004 in the EZLN rebel territories.

## **Acknowledgements**

My doctoral studies were supported by the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología, and I received support from the Graduate School Fellowship for Dissertation Work in Geography for the writing of my work.

I would like to thank Betty Ann Abbetamarco and Elaine Gordon of the Geography Department at Rutgers University; and to Gerardo Bocco, and Patricia Olivera at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

My gratitude to the people of the Seminario Permanente de Estudios Chicanos y de Fronteras for their commentaries to my work in the early stages of research. Thanks also to the Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas for having allowed me to participate in the Civil Camps for Peace. I want to thank to my interviewees, to the people who aided me during my fieldwork, to all the comp@s of the EZLN, and especially to Jorge Santiago, for his kindness and insightful thoughts.

I would also like to express thanks to Elwin Wyly and Jozseph M. Borocz for their academic advice, and to David Hughes for his critical reading of my work. I gratefully acknowledge the intellectual mentorship and friendship of Neil Smith, Juan Manuel Sandoval, and very especially of Briavel Holcomb, without whose patience, encouragement and support would have been impossible to reach the final line.

The friendship of Karla and Greg, Mariela and José Juan, Rosita and Jorge, Ismael, Carlita, Janette, Banu, Aziz, Marco Vinicio, and Irenne, provided my work and staying in the U.S. meaningful. Thanks also to my friends Valeria, Oscar, and Olivia for helping me with the editing process. To Annie Bellows for all the emotional adventures together, and to Dulce, my lifetime courageous friend.

Finally, the completion of this work is one of the greatest expectations I shared with my family. Thanks to my uncle Raúl, for his encouragement. To Carlos, my soul mate, and Nora, for her courage and hope. To Eva and Rodolfo, for their faith and love. To Oliva y Carlos, my parents, for the education they gave me, and for always believe in me. Thank you all for having walked with me the path of the *caracol*.

To Graciela Uribe, my mentor and greatest inspiration at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, to my mother, who is not with me anymore, and to Rodolfo, my companion, this work is dedicated.

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“I am going to narrate the events that my husband and me lived during our travel vacation to Chiapas in 1994. After we have spent several days in the city of Tuxtla Gutiérrez and its surroundings, we decided to drive south and visit the town of Comitán. We arrived there at evening. It was the first day of January, so we went to the Church. The Priest was pledging for the New Year and suddenly he spoke to all of us: —“Now we are going to pray for all those who died this morning, and for all the other who will die later on today.”

The people got surprised and anxious after listened to the priest’s words. I waited until the mass was over. I followed the priest to the Sacristy and asked him about what was happening. Before answering me, he asked if we were from Chiapas. I told him we were from Mexico City and were visiting for Christmas and the New Year’s holidays. Then, he asked me if there in “Mexico” [Mexico City] the people haven’t heard yet about ‘the Zapatista guerilla’. I answered him — ‘No’. Finally, the priest advised us to return to the hotel immediately, or else to remain inside the Church with the rest of the people: —“I am going to close the doors of the Church right now to protect all the people. The ‘Zapatistas’ are already in Ocosingo and they are on their way to Las Margaritas.”

We choose to return to the hotel and then to leave to San Cristóbal immediately. At the hotel, other tourists were trying to run away from the town but there was no transportation available. Fortunately, we could get out rapidly because we had a rented car. Before leaving, the people at the hotel gave us all sort of commentaries in favor and against our decision of leaving the place, but still we decided to drive back to San Cristóbal right away.

It was very late in the night. Asking for the best route to San Cristóbal, a “*lugareño*” (local person) gave us his best advice: to avoid the secondary roads: —“These are the spots where the soldiers can catch you.” We were confused about whose ‘soldiers’ he was talking about: the zapatistas or the Mexican Army, but anyway we didn’t ask. And he gave us a last warning: —“Once you are on the highway, do not make any suspicious gesture or movement that would be misunderstood by the soldiers, they can kill you without hesitate. Don’t be aggressive with them if they get to stop you.”

During all the way back to San Cristóbal we had this feeling, this anxious thought that we could get kill here and die alone. We feared for our family. We were frightened. Fortunately, we arrived safe to Tuxtla. Nothing wrong happened to us and no one stopped us. We were at the hotel at the dawn. The place was full of activity and people. A lot of journalists were arriving. We left to the airport at 6 am trying to get on the next available fly to Mexico City, fortunately at that point it was more the people trying to get in to Chiapas than the ones willing to get out of there, so eventually we could fly back to the city.

After the years, I think that this movement that my husband and I met on its very beginnings, is now a struggle with a worldwide recognition, they are recognized for its tremendous social significance and my husband and me hope that they will succeed, we wish they to win and that its triumph will be for the benefit of all the people in the future.”

Olivia Delgado de Villegas, Mexico City, 2004.

## **Introduction**

Thirteen years ago, the Zapatista National Liberation Army, called on ‘the people of Mexico’ to join their indigenous insurgent forces and support their armed struggle to obtain work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace for the Mexican people. This indigenous army declared a war against the government and its military forces and included this war declaration and the former eleven demands in the so-called Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle (DSL), a document that has been known worldwide for the famous quotation of ‘Ya basta!’ or ‘Enough is enough!.’ The DSL was read in the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas, in the Highlands of Chiapas, Southeast Mexico, on January 1, 1994.

Between 1994 and 1998, the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee (CCRI-CG), which is the EZLN’s General Command, wrote and released five Declarations of the Lacandona Jungle to the national press in Mexico.<sup>1</sup> These documents

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<sup>1</sup> The CCRI-CG constitutes the EZLN’s leadership. It is a collective political structure integrated by different Committees in which all the ethnic indigenous groups in Chiapas are equally represented. These

were addressed as open letters to the Mexican society as well as to all ‘brothers and sisters’ in solidarity around the world. The themes for each declaration constitute an invaluable written memory of the EZLN’s principles, demands, strategies and means for struggle. However as I discuss in my work, they can be explored as the political bases of a multilayered project looking, on the one hand, to connect space, dignity and resistance at a national level as a means to fulfill the EZLN’s broad demand for the recognition of the rights of the *pueblos indígenas* (indigenous peoples) in Mexico, and on the other hand, to connect notions of space and dignity at the global scale to organize resistance against neoliberal globalization.

The EZLN’s initial strategy of war comprised the seizure of Mexico’s capital. This never happened as the Zapatistas originally planned, but rather it occurred in an unpredicted manner. On January 12, 1994 thousands of citizens peacefully marched to the Plaza de la Constitución, or *Zócalo* (Mexico City’s central square) in support of the Zapatistas, and demanding of then-president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) the end of the Federal military offensive he launched against the Zapatista Army in Chiapas. As a result of this demonstration a cease-fire was declared, and the EZLN started a dialogue with appointed federal government representatives in a first effort to achieve a political solution to the EZLN’s demands. This dialogue, known as the ‘Peace Talks’, took place in the Cathedral of San Cristóbal de las Casas, in February and March of 1994.

Ever since, the EZLN has built and reorganized its own political space, and as I will show, the Zapatistas have built and ‘named’ several (new) political spaces. After the uprising of 1994, the bulk of the EZLN’s social bases in the indigenous communities

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Committees correspond to ‘regions’ acknowledged by the EZLN. The CCRI has authority over the EZLN’s military command.

–‘the Zapatistas’, as they named to themselves– started a coordinated economic and political resistance in order to gain political autonomy for the Zapatista communities in Chiapas. They rejected all forms of government support either for production or social services, and they denied all federal and state authorities. On August 8 and 9, 1994, the Zapatistas defied the military blockade of the Mexican Army delimited then over the so-called ‘conflict zone’ (an area originally delimited by the Army in four municipalities in Chiapas: San Cristóbal de las Casas, Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas). The EZLN disregarded the blockade to organize the National Democratic Convention (CND) in the town of Guadalupe Tepeyac, in the Lacandona jungle. The CND was intended to collectively discuss proposals for a ‘transitional government’, and to write a ‘new Constitution’ with the Mexican people. The Convention was held in a place the Zapatistas called ‘Aguascalientes’; this place did not exist before but it was built and ‘named’ for this sole purpose. The CND was the first in a series of national mobilizations organized by the EZLN in the following years to mobilize the solidarity of the civil society (in the country and overseas), in support of a political solution. These mobilizations include: the National Liberation Movement (1994), the Plebiscite for Peace and Democracy (1995), the Inter-Continental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism (1996), the Zapatista National Liberation Front, (1996), and the National Consultation for Peace (1999). These mobilizations are documented in the five DSLs.

On December 19, 1994, the EZLN made a second major military movement this time to trespass the military blockade. The Zapatista Army ‘broke’ the blockade and advanced with their ‘regular troops’ into the four municipalities of the conflict zone and another 34 municipalities in the Highlands and the Lacandona regions, and declared them



as Zapatista Rebel Municipalities (MRZ). None of these operations were armed, but they were a peaceful territorial maneuver to show the extended presence of the EZLN and of the Zapatista-based communities in a third part of the 111 municipalities in Chiapas. To a large extent, the ‘breaking’ of the blockade, as it is symbolically recalled, and eventually the declaration of a ‘Zapatista Rebel Territory’ integrated by the MRZ, marked the moment when the conflict between the EZLN and the Mexican government became significantly a spatial issue. As I intend to show, the war against the Zapatistas in Chiapas has resulted in a complex metamorphosis of space, and in particular, in an escalated process of re-appropriating the dominant meanings, the spatial practices and the representations of space to practicing political resistance and building indigenous autonomy. So far, the strength gained by the EZLN by means of practicing political autonomy and economic resistance, this ‘dignified resistance’, as they call it, has been one of EZLN’s strongest weapons to make the Zapatista indigenous rebellion politically and spatially significant at different levels –from the local to the global.

On February 16, 1996, the EZLN and the government signed the most important political agreement achieved to day: the San Andres Agreements (ASA). The ASA were to comprise a constitutional recognition of the right of the indigenous peoples to autonomy, broadly understood in these accords as a means to recognize the characteristics of the indigenous peoples own social, political and cultural ways of organization and government. The government then and none of the administrations that came afterwards have fulfilled the ASA. As a result of this, along the years the EZLN has undertaken a series of actions to take the ASA into practice in the rebel territories. First of all, the rebel municipalities were re-named as Zapatista Autonomous Rebel

Municipalities (MAREZ). Late in August 1996, the Zapatistas broke the military blockade for a third time to organize the First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism. They invited people from all over the world to go into the rebel territories to participate in public assemblies to discuss possible global strategies ‘to defeat’ neoliberalism.<sup>2</sup> For this encounter the Zapatistas built five new spaces and else named them as ‘Aguascalientes’ (in resemblance of the Aguascalientes of Guadalupe Tepeyac, by then already destroyed by the federal army in a military offensive in February of 1995). The EZLN symbolically ‘gave’ these spaces to the civil society to work with them in supporting peaceful resistance and promoting the ‘encounter’ of the Zapatistas with the national and international ‘civil societies’.<sup>3</sup> The Aguascalientes were built in Oventic, Roberto Barrios, Morelia, Francisco Gómez and, La Realidad in the Highlands and the Lacandona regions in Chiapas.

Throughout the years the local context of the use of military and paramilitary warfare to defeat the Zapatista rebellion has been accounted by several Human Rights and NGOs in Mexico and overseas, which keep recording the state of violence in Chiapas. According to their data, the federal army maintains control and permanent surveillance in all the highways in Chiapas and especially in the entrances to San Cristóbal and the other indigenous regions in the state. Chiapas has been militarized and the army maintains a number above the 40, 000 soldiers, numerous military bases, headquarters and checkpoints surrounding the Zapatista communities. In addition, the accounted negative

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<sup>2</sup> In the encounter the EZLN denounced neoliberalism as a universal system ‘to annihilate human dignity’. As I will discuss in the upcoming chapters, the opposition between neoliberal globalization and indigenous autonomy constitutes a central topic for the EZLN’s political practice, in particular for the demand to construct a ‘space of dignity’.

<sup>3</sup> The EZLN utilizes the word ‘civil society’ in plural to emphasize not only the national and international composition of the civilians that collaborate with the Zapatistas, but also in order to remark its cultural diversity.

effects of such state of occupation include: thousands of displaced people, the invasion of communal lands, harassment and violence against women and children, the cultivation of marihuana, the spreading of prostitution, tensions between Zapatista and non-Zapatista communities, the creation of paramilitary groups, repression, torture and illegal detentions, and the launching of state-sponsored Low Intensity Warfare (LIW).

Under this state of violence, in 2003 the EZLN started a new phase in the long-term of peacefully using resistance to building up indigenous autonomy in the Zapatista Rebel Territory, and as I intend to show, in the ultimate goal of this indigenous rebellion to construct a ‘space of dignity’. Today, the Zapatistas have their own health, education, commerce, and government structures, organized around two major government and territorial structures: Good Government Juntas (JBG), and Zapatista Caracoles, both inaugurated on August 9, 2003.<sup>4</sup> The EZLN has broadly explained the role of the Juntas as an ‘organizing effort’ of the Zapatista communities to build political autonomy as self-government; so the Juntas might be initially understood as political bodies practicing government in the MAREZ. And the Caracoles have been described as ‘government seats’; so they correspondingly might be understood as spaces that are dwelling the Good Government.

Yet, the functioning of these spaces is not easy to be defined political, cultural or territorially. The Caracoles are not ‘new’ spaces so long they correspond to each of the five Aguascalientes built for the Intercontinental Encounter in 1996. Hence, there is a second important idea which is pointing out to its symbolic meaning: the Caracoles are best identified with the image of a sea snail shell (a conch). For the Zapatistas the

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<sup>4</sup> “Caracol” means “snail” in English. Caracoles is the plural.

labyrinth shape of the caracol is as important to represent the inwards and outwards, political and cultural layers of the Zapatista resistance, and it is equally symbolizing the lines of 'the heart' and 'the reason' of the indigenous peoples.

## CHAPTER ONE WHO, WHAT AND WHY

En esta estrella de cinco puntas va la figura del ser humano: la cabeza, las dos manos y los dos pies, el corazón rojo que une las cinco partes y las hace una. Somos seres humanos y eso quiere decir que tenemos dignidad. Ésta es la bandera de la dignidad. Recuerda siempre que nuestra lucha es por el hombre. –EZLN, Comunicado November 17, 1994.<sup>5</sup>

### Subject and perspective

The first Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle constitutes the EZLN's declaration of war but it is also the very first public statement the Zapatistas addressed to the Mexican people. In it the EZLN describes to itself as an indigenous army, and the reasons for having taken arms are justified as the result of the long-term national history of exploitation and dispossession of the indigenous peoples in Mexico. The 'dispossessed' are millions, they said, and hence the war they declared on the government is explained as 'a last but a fair resort' to fight for the peoples' fundamental political rights: "We declare that we will not stop fighting until the basic demands of our people have been met by forming a government of our country that is free and democratic" (*Declaration of the*

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<sup>5</sup> "The figure of a human being rests inside this five-point star: a head, two hands, two feet, and a red heart that binds the five parts as one. We are human beings, and this means we have dignity. This is the flag of dignity. Remember that our struggle is always for the human being".

*Lacandona*, 1994).<sup>6</sup> In response to this declaration, the Ministry of the Interior released a first statement informing to the people of ‘a delicate situation’ occurring in four municipalities in Chiapas: San Cristóbal de las Casas, Ocosingo, Las Margaritas, and Altamirano. In the government’s statement, the EZLN is portrayed as ‘an extremist, violent, professional and well trained organization’, and the armed uprising is described as ‘the work of professionals’, an action organized not by the indigenous but by group of ‘radicals leaders’ (foreigners and nationals) who were manipulating ‘the misfortune’ of ‘those who have suffered recent adverse economic conditions’.<sup>7</sup> These earlier and opposite public images of the EZLN (either as an indigenous army fighting for a free and democratic country, or on the contrary as an extremist organization of professionals of violence manipulating the indigenous of Chiapas) are important to give a primary sense of the basic political polarization in the public opinion and in the outlining of the academic agendas that have looked at the reasons and the consequences of the EZLN uprising.

The EZLN has largely used cultural and political representations of its struggle to claim for universal concerns such as democracy, justice and sovereignty, and making specific demands for autonomy, justice, and dignity for the indigenous peoples, and has used these representations to be recognized as a political subject capable of demanding a radical transformation in Mexico. The process of gaining this recognition has comprised several stages and means for political and peaceful resistance of the Zapatistas and of the civil society, and very importantly it has implied an intense mobilization of such effort

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<sup>6</sup> For the five Declarations of the Lacandona I am using the English translations from the EZLN web site at <http://www.ezln.org>

<sup>7</sup> The report was released to the press and read on broadcasted national TV by Socorro Díaz, the sub-secretary of Civil Protection, an office from the Secretaría de Gobernación (Ministry of the Interior), on January 8, 1994.

across different material and symbolic dimensions of space. In the short term, the declaration of a ‘rebel territory’ based on the ‘dignified’ economic and political resistance of the Zapatista-based communities, resulted in a possibility of gaining control over land and natural resources that are at the base of their social and cultural reproduction. In the mid term, the basic confrontation between the EZLN and the Mexican government became a legal struggle to obtain the recognition of the indigenous political and territorial autonomy in the Constitution. And in the long-term, MAREZ, Good Government Juntas, and Caracoles stand for as symbols of and material basis for eventually obtaining a ‘space of dignity’ for the indigenous people.

The EZLN made a first reference to this demand during the Intercontinental Encounter against Neoliberalism in 1996. Then, EZLN’s Comandante Hernán, spoke of the Zapatista struggle as a possibility for human beings to construct a ‘space of dignity’, that is an opportunity for people to construct a space to practice political fundamental rights such as democracy, sovereignty and autonomy. How can a ‘space of dignity ‘ be conceptually defined? How can it be socially produced? How can it be a means for social transformation?

### **Significance of research**

In the first years, the main body of the research on the EZLN was devoted to better understand the causes and the effects of the Zapatista rebellion, extensive investigation was done on re-constructing the settings of the historical, social, political, economic, demographic, and ethnic background of Chiapas from the Colonial times to present. Major research was later focused in a variety of related themes such as democratization,

justice, peace and human rights, national security, civil society and citizenship, resistance and social movements, autonomy, ethnicity and indigenous struggles, historiography and regional development, neoliberalism and globalization, non-governmental organizations. Within this broad perspective, the connection between the EZLN struggle and the processes of democratization in Mexico, along with the EZLN's position of not taking the state power but rather to reconstruct the practice of government 'from below', is often acknowledged as the core of the EZLN's revolutionary nature.

In a similar fashion, it is gaining major attention the approaches exploring gender issues, especially those interested in the topic of the indigenous women's rights and the struggle of the Zapatista women to demand equality and major political participation in the Zapatista communities, as well as the research on so-called postmodern and transnational politics looking at the pioneering role of this indigenous rebellion in using cyberspace and new information technologies as a means for organizing resistance and international activism against neoliberalism.

However, my thesis is not focusing the influence of the Zapatista struggle over these or other particular spheres centering the political mobilization or the empowerment of cultural (indigenous) identity. My perspective on the intertwining of contemporary social movements, culture politics, and resistance is rather intended to explore the emancipatory content embedded in the connection between space, dignity, and resistance, as it might derived from the calling of this rebellion to pursue a revolutionary transformation by means of peaceful and civil resistance, and more specifically whereby demanding the state to respect 'the dignity' of the indigenous peoples (as I will show, meant respect to its cultural, political and territorial rights before the neoliberal project of



the nation). From this general perspective, my approach to the Zapatista struggle is intended to shed a light not only on the resulting relationships between space, dignity and resistance, but to look forward to the meaning these concepts and relationships may have within the larger context of the production of space in capitalism. From a disciplinary perspective, the demand of the EZLN to construct a 'space of dignity' represents a challenge to overcome any mechanistic antinomy between class and cultural analysis and so, it is a chance to explore multiple crossings and possibilities to bind space to imagination, space to class, space to culture, space to resistance, space to dignity, and eventually of bringing together space and revolution.

Several years ago, Camú and Duano (1994) wrote about the impact of the EZLN rebellion for the long-term political scenario in Mexico. According to the authors, after 1994 the country was at the verge of two possible scenarios: one in which the EZLN struggle was the last push for an eventual transition to democracy; and a second one in which the country walked with accelerated pace towards a state of increased repression and violence and the strengthening of the authoritarian state. In March 2001, twenty-three EZLN's Commanders marched to Mexico City to demand before the Congress the fulfillment of the San Andres Agreements. In April 2001, an 'Indigenous Bill' was approved and went into force on a national level but, as I discuss later, the new law diverted considerably from the contents agreed upon with EZLN in 1996. The EZLN considered this law as 'treason' to the indigenous peoples and withdrew from dialogue. Dialogue has remained the same ever since.

As of writing (September 2007) the EZLN remains under military and paramilitary siege, and with none of their primary demands resolved and neither to be a

part of the political agenda of the recently appointed government of Felipe Calderón (2006). Mexico is experiencing one of the most outrageous crisis of governability, violence and repression as a result of another fraudulent presidential election and the staying of the extreme right wing party in power.<sup>8</sup> And as for the EZLN, the Zapatistas have pushed once more to create political alliances with civil society to obtain democracy, sovereignty and dignity for the indigenous and the people in Mexico.

In 2006, Subcomandante Marcos, the EZLN's spokesperson, and now known as 'Delegate Zero', traveled across the country to promote the so-called 'the Other campaign', a political tour that ran almost in parallel to the presidential campaigns, and ended at the end of the year. This new call on the people was looking after to build a 'left block' and to articulate a national movement against the neoliberal project in Mexico. The Other was at the same time the latest call to do not leave the Zapatistas to struggle alone and to peacefully demand the government the constitutional recognition of the indigenous peoples rights agreed in the ASA.

For the time being, the Zapatista struggle continues as well as it goes on the accelerated pace of the country towards the strengthening of an authoritarian state and the increase of repression and violence. However, in the light of this critical political and economic situation in Mexico, the Zapatistas are not anymore the only grassroots struggle confronting the neoliberal project in the country, so are struggling the unionized teachers and the members of the (APPO), or the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca, so

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<sup>8</sup> In 2000, Vicente Fox, of the Party of National Action (PAN), won the presidential elections defeating to the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), which remained in power over a 70 years period in Mexico. In September 2006, PAN's Felipe Calderón, was declared the winner of the presidential run, after a post-electoral crisis due to a major documented electoral fraud against the left-candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, candidate of the coalition "Por el Bien de Todos", lead by the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

have been the peasants in San Salvador Atenco, in Estado de Mexico. But so these social struggles are being repressed by the state violence. The war against the Zapatistas and against the social movements struggling for social justice and the democratization in Mexico is not over, and hence there is a reason to keep critically analyzing the devastating effects of neoliberal globalization upon the conditions of living and the diminishing of political rights in countries like Mexico and others in Latin America. I expect my research not only to give account of this indigenous social struggle considered to be the most important contemporary indigenous rebellion in Mexico, but to look forward to contribute to reassert the importance of geographical research for promoting social justice.

### **Methodology and data sources**

Research is proceeding in two analytical levels. An abstract level in which the EZLN struggle is analyzed in the light of broad resistance and political struggles against neoliberal globalization. This general perspective is important to analyze the global and the historical context in which the EZLN is posing to itself as a political subject resisting the neoliberal project at different spatial scales (local, national and global). And the other level, corresponds to the concrete analysis of the EZLN's demand to have a 'space of dignity', understood at this stage as a space to building up indigenous autonomy. This concrete level is also giving context to the ethnographic accounting of the practices, symbols and representations involved in the workings of the MAREZ, the Juntas, and the Zapatista Caracoles.

The discussion is organized around three significant moments crossing the symbolic calendar of the EZLN's resistance, which is the time line the Zapatistas have defined according to its own political practice:

- the Declarations of the Lacandona Jungle (1994 -1998),
- the breaking of the military blockade and the declaration of the Rebel territory (1994) and,
- the building of indigenous autonomy up to the inauguration of the Juntas and the Caracoles (1996-2003).

The research is focused around a case study and it is primarily based on qualitative research methods combining primary and secondary documental and archival sources, and extensive ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Spring 2002 and Summer 2004 in the MAREZ in the Highlands and the Lacandona regions in Chiapas. In the Spring 2002, I did a first three-week research staying, conducting bibliographical research in the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas, and doing participant observation fieldwork in Ixim, a Zapatista-based community in the region of Las Cañadas in the Lacandona jungle (I substituted the community's real name), where I stayed and participated in this community as a volunteer (civil observer) of the Civil Brigades for Peace, a program sponsored by the Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (CDHFBC), a human rights NGO based in San Cristóbal.

In the Summer 2004, I conducted extended fieldwork in Chiapas (twelve weeks). I did bibliography and archival research at the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS-Sureste), and the Centro de Información y Análisis de Chiapas (CIACH) in San Cristóbal de las Casas. I also conducted structured

interviews with scholars, researchers and local NGO activists. Interviews were made with Andrés Aubry (historian and local chronicler), Onésimo Hernández, of the Centro de Investigaciones Económicas y Políticas de Acción Comunitaria (CIEPAC), Ernesto Ledezma, of the Centro de Análisis Político e Investigaciones Sociales y Económicas (CAPISE), and Jorge Santiago, of Desarrollo Económico y Social de los Mexicanos Indígenas (DESMI). I did direct observation research in the Caracol of Oventic, belonging to the Autonomous Municipality of Ocosingo; in Jechvó, a Zapatista-based community in the state municipality of Zinacantán; in the Caracol of La Garrucha, in the Autonomous Municipality of Francisco Gómez; and in La Culebra, a Zapatista-based community in the Autonomous Municipality of Ricardo Flores Magón.

Before reviewing the bibliographical sources, I want to make a few notes about the available materials. It is important to acknowledge the richness of the interdisciplinary contributions (mainly from history and historiography, anthropology, sociology, and political science), as well as the diversity of the primary and secondary sources (chronologies, chronicles, monographies, magazines and journals, documentaries, fieldwork research, archival and web sources, essays, reports, books, testimonies, interviews, etcetera). However, there are significant differences in how research agendas are constructed by national or national-based scholars, and those who are approaching to the Zapatista rebellion from other national and cultural backgrounds.

These differences are reflected not only in the perspectives, spatial scales of reference (from the community to the global scale) and time framings (short-term to long-term), but also are translated to the use of language as a cultural domain and ultimately as a political arena. Here, the logical dominance of Spanish over English in the available literature, and

the need to depend and make a lot on translations of both languages have inevitably created a relative cultural gap. The issue is very frequently taken for granted without further analysis on the effects over the meanings and the representations of the addressed issues. In my work, unless noticed, all translations from Spanish to English are mine.

It is also of note the vast and rich bulk of published literature and political documents written by the EZLN, and very especially of Subcomandante Marcos, better known for its communiqués, essays and short stories. The existence and availability of this written memory of the Zapatistas' political ideas made the EZLN singular among any prior contemporary armed rebellion in Mexico.

As mentioned early, the EZLN has been recognized to be innovative in the use of cyberspace to promote and to win international support for their struggle. This skillfully utilization of the web for resistance has very much been an ability shared and built up in collaboration with national and international civil society. So far the bulk of the EZLN's political documents and Marcos' major political and literary works have been translated to English, French and other languages, and have been widely spread via the independent media and the world wide web.<sup>9</sup> These features are totally unprecedented for any prior indigenous or social rebellion in Mexico, and for a long time they very much contributed to turn Marcos and to some extent a whole idea of 'Zapatismo' into a worldwide cultural icon for political resistance. In my work I use the EZLN's documents to illustrate specific research issues and subjects, nevertheless a full analysis of this literature falls out of my present research goals.

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<sup>9</sup> Seven Stories Press, Open Media Series and Monthly Review have published several of the Subcomandante Marcos books in English. See [www.citylights.com](http://www.citylights.com)

Finally, in regarding to my fieldwork expectations and results, as previously noticed, Chiapas is under a state of militarization and paramilitarization due to the ongoing war against the EZLN, and this reality together with the fact that the rebel territory was in an organizing stage during the time I traveled in Chiapas, are conditions that imposed me limitations, very significantly by dropping all possibilities to get the authorization to conduct direct interviews with the Zapatistas in the communities and with the authorities in the Caracoles. Plus, I must point out that as a woman scholar doing research in a conflict zone in my home country, as well as the fact people knew I was a Mexican studying in the U.S., was not an easy identity to manage when interacting and getting accessibility into the field, and within a highly competitive local research environment. I discuss these particular concerns in a more extended manner in the Appendix I at the end of my work.

### **General structure of the work**

In the opening chapter, I address three introductory questions: who is the EZLN, what are the general demands of this indigenous army, and why is the EZLN fighting to fulfill their demands by means of peaceful and civil resistance. The chapter briefly explains the case study, the research methodologies and the data sources.

Chapter two discusses the reasons, the political subjects that are involved in the conflict, as well as the means for struggle used by the EZLN. The literature review offers a general perspective on the relationships between space, dignity and resistance in the light of current Cultural studies and Marxist-inspired approaches on globalization, resistance and social and indigenous movements.

In the chapter three, I use two texts wrote by Subcomandante Marcos, *The Global Jigsaw Puzzle*, and *Ponencia a 7voces 7*, to examine the historical context in which the EZLN is posing to itself as a political subject confronting neoliberal globalization. Based on this analysis I outline the major conceptual and practical levels that are at the core of the EZLN's demand to construct a 'space of dignity'. These levels are outlined through the major moments in the development of EZLN's political practice: the Declarations of the Lacandona Jungle; the 'breaking' of the military blockade, and current phase of Good Government.

Chapter four centers the political and the spatial developing of the EZLN's notions of sovereignty, democracy, and dignity. The overall perspective is focus on the five Declarations of the Lacandon Jungle (1994-1998), and the *Memoirs of the Intercontinental Encounter against Neoliberalism* (1996). In these documents I follow the mobilization of the Zapatista resistance across different material and symbolic dimensions of space, and its impact for different processes in the development of the Zapatista struggle, among them the building of the five Aguascalientes in the Lacandon Jungle and the sign of the ASA in 1996, and up to the approval of the so-called Indigenous Law by the Mexican Congress in 2001.

In chapter five I look back to the contemporary transformation of the Lacandona jungle into a valuable source of labor force and natural resources. I analyze the 'breaking' of the military blockade and the declaration of the Zapatista rebel territory in late 1994, and finally I document on the field some of the practices that have transformed the Lacandona into the core of the Zapatista rebel territories, and hence into a strategic scale for the EZLN rebellion.



Chapter six is a combined visual (photography) and descriptive narrative. In the first part, I introduce the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas as an ‘urban frontier’ of the Zapatista resistance. The second part includes interviews with NGO activists and members of the civil society on the ‘accompaniment’ (the collaborative and solidary work of the civil society with the EZLN). Lastly, I present an ethnographic account illustrating the role of the Caracoles as territorial bases to build several autonomous projects (focusing education and health projects). And in chapter seven, this ethnographic evidence is analyzed towards the re-elaboration of the notion of a ‘space of dignity’ on a theoretical level and within the specificity of the Zapatista struggle.

Finally, in the conclusive chapter the notion of a ‘space of dignity’ is theoretical and empirically constructed as an abstract framework to reflect on the possibilities of knitting together space, dignity, and resistance to organize resistance against neoliberal globalization. Plus, a final discussion is offered about the revolutionary nature of the notion of ‘space of dignity’ in the context of the production of space in capitalism.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE REASONS, THE SUBJECTS AND THE PRACTICES

San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chis.- A las 1.45 horas del 1 de enero de este año, sonó el timbre del teléfono 80444 de la XXXI Región Militar, a doce kilómetros de esta ciudad. El Comandante Gastón Menchaca Arias levantó la bocina. —General, ¿qué pasa en San Cristóbal? Hay mucha gente ... —No sé. ¿No es gente que está celebrando el Año Nuevo? Una hora y cuarto antes unos 800 miembros del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) habían tomado esta ciudad. —**Correa, López & Ramírez**, 1994, p.6.<sup>10</sup>

#### Constructing the object

*El Sureste en dos vientos: una tormenta y una profecía*, written by the Subcomandante Marcos in 1994, constitutes an essential initial reference for all those who have approached and aimed to understand the reasons, the subjects and the practices that are making the Zapatista rebellion. In the document, Marcos locates the place of Chiapas in Mexican history whereby depicting the plight of its more than one million indigenous Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Choles, Zoques, and Tojolabales who experience a state of exploitation, misery and death on every day bases:

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<sup>10</sup> “San Cristóbal de las Casas. Chis.- At 1.45 AM on January 1 of this year, it sound the bell of the telephone 80444 of the XXXI Military Region, to twelve kilometers of this city. Commander Gastón Menchaca Arias picked up the phone. —General, what is going on in San Cristóbal? There are a lot of people ... —I don’t know. Aren’t they celebrating the New Year? One hour and fifteen minutes before some 800 members of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) had taken this city.”

Chiapas with 75, 634.4 square kilometers, some 7, 500, 000 hectares, is the eighth largest state in Mexico. [...] But its greatest wealth is its 3.5 million people, two-thirds of whom live and die in the countryside. Half of the people do not have potable water, and two-thirds have no sewage systems. Ninety percent of the people in rural areas have little or no money income [...]. Education? The worst in the country. Seventy-two out of every one hundred children do not finish the first grade [...]. In every indigenous community it is common to see children carrying corn or wood, cooking or washing clothes, during school hours. Of the 16, 058 schoolrooms in Chiapas in 1989, only 96 were in indigenous areas [...]. Health? Capitalism leaves its mark: 1.5 million Chiapans have no medical services whatsoever. There are 0.2 clinics for every 1, 000 people, five times less than the national average [...], there are 0.5 doctors and 0.4 nurses for every 1, 000 persons, two times less than the national average [...]. One million indigenous people live in these lands and share with mestizos and ladinos a troubling nightmare: five hundred years after the “meeting of two worlds,” indigenous people have the option to die of misery or repression [...]. Had enough? Do you want to go home? Other places? In what country? Mexico? You will see the same thing; the colors, languages, landscape and names will change, but the people, the exploitation, the misery and the death are the same (Ross, 1995, p.35).

In tracing this reality back in history, Antonio García de León's *Resistencia y Utopía*, a work published in two volumes in 1994, continues to be one of the most significant and inspired contributions. The author follows the ‘history of resistance and utopia’ of the indigenous peoples for land and against exploitation in Chiapas from 15<sup>th</sup> century and up to the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s. He deeply examines the economic history and the structure of ethnic and class division in the state, and the impact of this background upon the production of a regional structure that has reinforced the unequal local structure of economic power. In *Fronteras Interiores* (2002), the author continues his research and extended it to the last 50 years identifying the major contemporary actors and circumstances that lead to the EZLN uprising.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The book of Thomas Benjamin, *A Rich land and Poor People* (Albuquerque: 1989), and the historical reader prepared by John Womack Jr., *Rebellion in Chiapas* (New York: 1999), are written in a similar fashion.

The novels of the Chiapaneca writer Rosario Castellanos constitute an appealing literary reference in the accounting of this long-term history. Written in the late 1950s and early '60s, she devoted several novels (*Oficio de Tinieblas*, 1977; *Ciudad Real*, 1997; *Balún Canán*, 2003) to depict the ancestral racism, the indigenous rebellions, and the conflictive relationships between indigenous, *caxlanes* (mestizos) and *caciques* (landowners).<sup>12</sup> The distinction she made between everyday life in Ciudad Real (San Cristóbal) and the country at the time clearly opposes and delimits the social spaces of the indigenous and the non-indigenous people. Her narrative, although secondary is an illuminating perspective for understanding the segregation and racism in Chiapas.

Research done on contemporary regional history and in connection to the EZLN struggle has constituted another vast historical vein. Chiapas-based scholars (Leyva and Ascencio, 1996; Burguete Cal y Mayor, 1998, 1999; De Vos, 2002) have focused on the economic transformations in Chiapas in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the growth of grassroots peasant organizations, the impact of state policies and reforms upon peasant life and the indigenous communities, especially in the Highlands and the Lacandona regions (which are now the heart of the territories controlled by the EZLN).<sup>13</sup> Xóchitl Leyva and Gabriel Ascencio did extended fieldwork research in the indigenous communities of the Lacandona before the EZLN uprising, between 1990 and 1993. The results were published in *Al filo del Agua* (1996). In it the authors analyze clustering processes around demographics, colonization, migration, socio-cultural and religious diversity, economic activities, agrarian conflicts, and examine how these processes contributed to create 'sub-regional' cultural and political identities in the Lacandona (e.g.

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<sup>12</sup> 'Caxlan' is utilized by the indigenous in Chiapas when referring to Mexican non-indigenous peoples. 'Mestizo' is a more extended synonym.

<sup>13</sup> I will refer to Jan de Vos' work in an extended manner in chapter five.

the ‘Tzeltaleros’ or ‘Choleros’, that are ethnicities derived from the first Tzeltal and Chol ethnic groups who migrated into the jungle). In addition, the authors introduce the notion of ‘*el common*’, in Tzeltal, to refering the collective practice of the indigenous communities to organize assemblies, and their function to regulate and making the rules that order all the different spheres of social life.

Araceli Burguete (1998) discusses local phenomena of ‘civil autonomic insurgency’ attempting to get access to the local power in Chiapas in the aftermath of the Zapatista rebellion (October to December of 1994). She analyses the cases of the so-called Pluri-ethnic Autonomous Regions, organized by the CEOIC, a peasant and indigenous organization, and the appointment of local journalist and activist Amado Avendaño as ‘governor in rebellion’.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the author began to address two important processes at the time, the first, the differential development of political autonomy in the MAREZ, and the second, the local conflict of governability derived from the functioning of the rebel municipalities in direct defiance to the state municipalities.<sup>15</sup> Other authors, like Abelardo Hernández (1998), have focused the contribution of earlier events to the contemporary political organization of the indigenous communities in Chiapas, for example, the First Indigenous Congress in October 1974, regarded as the starting point of all major regional indigenous and peasant organizations in the state, among them, the Rural Association of Collective Interest (ARIC) in the Lacandona jungle (it is recognized ARIC’s directly involvement in the political organization of the EZLN in the 1980s). Besides, the book is a fine chronicle of the

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<sup>14</sup> I will refer to Avendaño and the government in rebellion in chapter five.

<sup>15</sup> It is also worthy of notice the author’s contribution in giving voice to the indigenous intellectuals, politicians and writers on the particular topic of indigenous autonomy. See the articles of Margarito Ruiz Hernández, Antonio Hernández Cruz, Marcelino Gómez Núñez, Miguel González Hernández, and Elvia Quintanar Quintanar in Cal y Burguete (Guatemala:1999).

complicated and many times interrupted process of dialogue between the EZLN and the Mexican government from the release of the document ‘Compromises for a Dignified Peace in Chiapas’, in March 2, 1994,<sup>16</sup> and up to the sign of the San Andres Agreements in 1996,<sup>17</sup> and of other lesser known but important grass-roots organized events that happened in preparation for the San Andres Talks, included the so-called Indigenous Forum, and the Special Forum for the Reform of the State, in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

Similarly fashioned in the reconstruction of Chiapas’ recent social and economic history, national newspapers like *La Jornada*, *Proceso*, *Reforma*, and magazines like *Revista Chiapas* and *Memoria*, were strongly aimed to present the basic profile of the structural and multilayered marginalization and poverty of the indigenous peoples of the more than three million indigenous people, and specially of the four major ethnic groups: Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Choles and Tojolabales, and the two main indigenous regions in the state: the Highlands and the Lacandona jungle.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to these sources, the contribution of local and regional publications must be equally noticed in the accounting of the structural causes of the conflict, for instance, in providing data on the economic crisis that affected the local coffee producers in the 1980s.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The document was the result of the Peace Talks in San Cristóbal, and among other issues it includes the government’s compromise to stop the military offensive against the Zapatista insurgents, and the compromise of both sides to further dialogue.

<sup>17</sup> In addition, the book includes important references to the participation of civil society in the dialogue between the EZLN and the government. The topic of this ‘unexpected’ political answer of civil society has been studied in previous historical experiences in Mexico, for instance, during the aftermath of the earthquake in Mexico City in September 1985, and in 1988, to defy the electoral fraud in the presidential elections occurred in that year. See Carlos Monsiváis, *Entrada Libre* (Mexico: 1987).

<sup>18</sup> The analysis of these national-based journal sources falls out of my research purposes.

<sup>19</sup> As an example, *Síntesis*, a regional newspaper, published a special series on Chiapas and the armed conflict including data on the coffee crisis and its impact upon the producers in the Lacandona, and about the amount of the social welfare budget in the state. In 1993 the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad, the major national social program to alleviate poverty, spent an average of less 0.58 pesos-a-day (less than 0.1

This international crisis affecting local agriculture has been linked by various authors to the later political radicalization of the local producers in the 1990s, and with a deeper examination of the Zapatista uprising in the continuity of the peasant rebellions and larger processes of socio-political organization related to major economic and political changes in Mexico (Hernández, 1995; Gilly, 1997). Neil Harvey's *The Chiapas rebellion: the struggle for land and democracy* (1998), is in fact one of the most significant examples of this focus on the structural causes of the rebellion within the long-term perspective of peasant mobilizations in Mexico, and so it is his analyses of the impact of the Zapatismo over major areas of political struggle in the country, such as, democratization, indigenous peoples and women's rights, and the land reform in Chiapas.

*Para entender Chiapas* (1997), a statistical publication prepared by CIACH and other San Cristóbal-based NGOs, provides a basic database on the social and political conditions in the state. Data is intended to present a perspective on the contrast between the richness of the available natural resources, and the state of poverty and marginalization of the majority of the people. On the one hand, Chiapas possesses a huge stock of resources: natural biodiversity,<sup>20</sup> agriculture (mainly coffee, bananas, cacao and maize), bovine and porcine animal raising, oil and electricity production. In 1996 the percentage of the indigenous population in Mexico was near ten per cent (8, 701, 688 millions), the state concentrated 26.4 per cent of speakers of an indigenous language 5 years of age and older, and a large young population –44.2 per cent was 15 years of age or younger. But on the other hand, 84 out of the 111 municipalities in the state are

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USD) to each of the 584, 000 inhabitants living in the municipalities of the Lacandona jungle. See *Síntesis* (Mexico: 1994).

<sup>20</sup> 40 per cent of the national variety of plants; 36 per cent of the mammals' species; 34 per cent of amphibians and reptiles; 66 per cent of birds' species, and 80 per cent of the butterflies' species are located in the state.

classified with high and highest levels of marginalization; 40 per cent of the working population earn the minimal wage or less; there is one doctor for every 1, 132 persons, and one hospital-bed for every 1, 400 people. In the marginalized areas, the major reported causes of death are treatable diseases, such as tuberculosis and malnutrition, and Chiapas occupies the first place nationally in child mortality due to diarrheic diseases. Finally, CIACH includes original data on human rights, civil society, militarization, political parties and elections, and religion in Chiapas, and a section related to the EZLN major political events and the general state of the conflict up to 1997.

For a time researchers also maintained a profound interest to disentangle the origins and the internal structure of the EZLN, as well as the aim of reconstructing the involvement of other local actors in the conflict. As mentioned earlier, the years that followed the uprising were a period of intensive military and information blockade in the state, but it was surprisingly a phase of greatest ‘openness’ of the rebel territories to journalism and academic research, and hence a great time to account the story of the EZLN from the inside. Many of the interviews done with Subcomandante Marcos, with the EZLN’s General Command, and with Samuel Ruíz García (the ex-bishop of the Dioceses of San Cristóbal de las Casas) were made during this time, and this primary information contributed very importantly to enrich the knowledge of the EZLN’s background prior to 1994. For instance, Camú and Duano (1994) used interviews with Zapatista insurgents, and with Samuel Ruíz to reconstructing the history of the EZLN in the period 1980-90s. Samuel Ruiz refers to the work of thousands of indigenous catholic catechists in introducing the principles of the Theology of Liberation in the indigenous communities in Chiapas. Ruiz recognized the encouragement of these principles to



struggle against misery and injustice were a great influence in the political development and in the organizing capabilities of the communities. However, as it is also noticed, there were major differences between the Zapatista communities and the Dioceses back to the eve of the uprising in 1993. These differences arose from the communities' decision to leave the political and peaceful means to resolve the communities' major demands (as it has been advised by the Dioceses), and instead to start the armed rebellion. Additionally, the authors explore the ideological development of the EZLN and the early influences of Marxist thought and the militant left, in particular the integration of the National Liberation Front (FLN), which in fact is recognized as the true military origin of the EZLN. The Frente was the first guerrilla cell active in Chiapas between 1972 and 1974.<sup>21</sup>

In a similar fashion, Mexican historian Andrés Aubry did extensive research on the Dioceses of Chiapas and the ecclesiastic work of Samuel Ruíz. In *Memoria y caminar de la Diócesis de Chiapas* (2000) the author follows the role of the ex-Bishop as a 'political mediator' during the 'Peace Talks' in San Cristóbal (February 22 – March 2, 1994), and later as founder and head of the National Intermediation Commission (CONAI).<sup>22</sup> Aubry also documents the pastoral labor of the Dioceses in organizing health and housing committees, cooperatives for production and consumption, legal advisory,

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<sup>21</sup> A copy of the original FLN's statutes was made public in the newspapers in Mexico. In it, the EZLN is acknowledged as one of the FLN's military organisms. As it is referred in the book, the FLN was discovered and its main leaders captured by the Mexican Police then. The EZLN reappeared in Chiapas on November 17 of 1983. An English version of the statutes (ESTATUTOS DE LAS FUERZAS DE LIBERACION NACIONAL) can be also consulted in John Womack Jr., *Rebellion in Chiapas* (New York: 1999).

<sup>22</sup> The CONAI was organized in October 13, 1994, to be a mediator between the EZLN and the government representatives. It was disintegrated in 1998 during an exacerbated period of counterinsurgency and government attempts to dismantle the MAREZ.

literacy, and human rights workshops in the indigenous communities.<sup>23</sup> From a different perspective, yet in a like testimonial style are Guiomar Rovira's *¡Zapata Vive!* (1994), and *Mujeres de maíz* (1997). The former is an extensive testimony of the history and the internal organization of the Zapatista Army as it was recounted to her in direct interviews with insurgents and members of the CCRI. The latter constitutes one of the very first contributions focusing a gender perspective. It includes testimonies of Tzeltal indigenous women, and women in the CCRI who narrate the ways they began to get organized, their particular demands and their political participation in the Zapatista struggle.

As mentioned early, the women's indigenous rights and Zapatismo is nowadays one of the major research subjects especially on topics related to the so-called 'Revolutionary Laws of Women', which were originally released along with the first Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle in December 1993. These laws are basically addressing the demands of women for equality and justice to participate in the struggle and to hold military ranks in the armed forces, to hold positions of authority and leadership, to decide upon family, work, marriage, women's and reproductive health issues, and they specifically prevent violence against women and severely punished rape and attempted rape by family members and strangers.<sup>24</sup>

In opposition, there was an agenda strongly aimed to detract from or to reduce the support of the Zapatista rebellion within the civil society and the public opinion. The best-known examples are Carlos Tello's *La Rebelión de las Cañadas* (1996) and, *Marcos. La Genial Impostura* (1997), by journalist Bertrand de la Grange and Maité

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<sup>23</sup> In the same book, Aubry made other interesting although less known historical references. For example, the sign of the incorporation of Chiapas into the Mexican Federation took place in the Cathedral of San Cristóbal on September 14, 1824.

<sup>24</sup> For a complete version of the 'Revolutionary Laws of Women' see D. Goetze's Revolutionary Women (<http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/~geneve/zapwomen/goetze/paper.html>).

Rico. The former, detailed the EZLN's background and logistics on issues such as the names and real identities of the main Zapatista Commanders, the location of the training camps in the communities, the names and political affiliation of the *mestizo* activists that worked with the indigenous in the 1970s, or the well known fact nowadays that the Mexican army knew about the EZLN presence in Las Cañadas region (in the towns of Avellanal, Amador, Patihuitz, Agua Azul, and San Quintín) since the Spring of 1993: "By the time, the presence of the guerrilla was a loud secret in the entire Republic. The greater publications in the country regularly received news from local cattle owners about the guerrilla. Everybody knew it" (p.159). The latter is pretty much recalled for the similar intention 'to unmask' the EZLN but here the authors centered the attention on Subcomandante Marcos. The book uses testimonies of former EZLN members alleged to be deserters, and who collaborated with the Mexican army and the intelligent services in unveiling the EZLN internal organization, and identifying Marcos as Rafael Sebastián Guillén.<sup>25</sup> The book's general background goes back to the origins of the FLN in August 6, 1969 and its arrival in the Lacandona jungle in 1972, and it even includes figures about the composition of the Zapatista Army: 65, 000 indigenous forming the social bases, 1, 500 militias and 300 insurgents. At the time, the book was intended to be a counter-argument to the prevailing academic and public idea that the EZLN was in fact pushing to hasten major political changes in the country. Nonetheless the detractory intention, the authors recognized to Marcos one great contribution: "to have opened the Pandora's box of the discourse invented about a prosperous country, a democratic country, a respectful

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<sup>25</sup> According to the government, Rafael Guillén was born in the city of Tampico, in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, on June 19, 1957. President Ernesto Zedillo revealed this information to the national public press and media in February of 1995.

government on its native peoples. All the masks have been torn down except the one of Marcos” (p.429).<sup>26</sup>

From an overall perspective, it is important to recognize the impact of this agenda for the greater polarization around the debate on the EZLN struggle at the time. As a matter of fact, for a decade the Zapatistas, its sympathizers and detractors as well, have acknowledged a significant movement of the conflict into the terrain of ideas up to the point of literally becoming a ‘war of words’ between intellectuals, journalist and politicians debating on the EZLN. The magnitude and the logic of this battle to conquer the public opinion is indeed another identifiable theme of interest (Trejo, 1994), nevertheless I want to address a last subject regarding the topic of the militarization of Chiapas and the LIW launched and sponsored by the State since 1995.

As noted earlier, ever since 1994 the Federal army keeps thousands of soldiers, numerous military bases, headquarters and checkpoints sustaining a military blockade of the Zapatista communities, and controlling the highways and other accesses to Chiapas, in particular to the Lacandona jungle. According to the CIACH (1997), in the first year of the EZLN struggle, the main institutions and actors denounced for human rights violations were the Federal army, the preventative and the public police, militants of the PRI, municipal authorities, white guards and the immigration authorities. And, the reported annual military expenses were calculated as 200 USD millions.

Research on this issue has resulted in an unexpected coordinated work done by scholars, journalists and NGOs in denouncing and documenting the strategies and effects

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<sup>26</sup> In a similar intelligentsia fashion, though published earlier, the *Executive Intelligence Review* released a special report on the Zapatista struggle in 1994. In the report the uprising in Chiapas is depicted as a ‘terrorist strike’ involving 600 - 1, 000 combatants, and a ‘guerilla’ tied to other guerrillas in the continent, such as Sendero Luminoso in Peru, allegedly to be the EZLN’s ‘senderista cousins’, and to the Guatemalan refugees in Mexico. See *Executive Intelligence Review* (Washington: 1994).

of the LIW, and by doing so it has contributed to demonstrate that the institutional violence against the indigenous people should not be left out of the analysis of the causes, the effects, and the solutions to this conflict. As Hernández (1998) points out, in the distant past, the indigenous peoples have been ‘hanged’, ‘iron marked’, ‘beaten’, ‘re-baptized’, ‘thrown off the precipice’, ‘cropped of their ears’, ‘decapitated’, ‘hooked’, ‘expelled’. And after 1994, he continues, they are ‘chased’, ‘tortured’, ‘executed’, ‘bombed’, ‘displaced’ and so on. Violence and repression in Chiapas: “is a painful quotidian fact” (p.78).

*Proceso*, a nationwide independent periodical, obtained and published the military strategy launched by the government started in 1995. In *Proceso*, Carlos Marín (1998), published full sections of the so-called ‘Plan de Campaña Chiapas 94’, designed by the Ministry of Defense. The plan includes and details specific counter-insurgency strategies, such as mass psychological manipulation, the making of alliances with local *caciques* and landowners to recruit PRI militants and political detractors to train them as paramilitary forces. Guillermo Correa (1998) goes deeply in describing the major ‘fronts’ of this LIW strategy: the military, the civilian, and the public opinion. Counter-insurgency operations, he points out, are coordinated military and paramilitary actions aimed to use ‘all the possible and available civilian means’ not for the physical annihilation of ‘the enemy’ but to isolate it and destroy its moral support.

The effects of the militarization and the LIW have been one of the major foci of research done on the Zapatista uprising. For this topic, one of the best sources came from the printed and the electronic information provided by the NGOs based in Chiapas, mainly in San Cristóbal de las Casas. They have in tandem contributed to raise

consciousness awareness and the interest of the public opinion in the conflict, and to continuing supporting and expressing solidarity with the Zapatista communities. *La Ocupación Militar en Chiapas* (Hernández, et al., 1994), offers an extensive statistic and fieldwork-based analysis of the military occupation and the violation of the indigenous communities' territorial rights. The right to territory is a key element in the Zapatista demand for autonomy.<sup>27</sup> In 2005, the CDHFBC, a human rights NGO based in San Cristóbal, presented a case before the Inter-American Human Rights Commission demanding the trial of ex-President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) for the crimes committed against the indigenous people. The denounced was based on the report 'La política genocida en el conflicto armado en Chiapas', prepared by the Center of ten years of counter-insurgency in the state.<sup>28</sup>

Last but not least, in the world wide web the EZLN related sites are countless, though some of them are more relevant for having a more direct connection whether for collaboration projects or to promote the solidarity with the Zapatistas: the EZLN's webpage ([www.ezln.org.mx](http://www.ezln.org.mx)), and since 2003, Radio Insurgente, the Zapatista system of radio broadcast ([www.radioinsurgente.org](http://www.radioinsurgente.org)); Enlace Civil ([enlacecivil@laneta.apc.org](mailto:enlacecivil@laneta.apc.org)); CIEPAC, Centro de Investigaciones Económicas y Políticas de Acción Comunitaria ([ciepac@laneta.apc.org](mailto:ciepac@laneta.apc.org)); SIPAZ, Servicios Internacionales para la Paz ([www.nonviolence.org](http://www.nonviolence.org)); Revista Rebeldía ([www.revistarebeldia.org](http://www.revistarebeldia.org)).<sup>29</sup> The following are merely examples of the type of information provided through these means.

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<sup>27</sup> Ledesma, et al., *Always Near, Always Far* (Mexico: 2000) is another reliable reference for the same topic.

<sup>28</sup> See Balboa (*La Jornada*, February 10, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Other web-based references to be considered are: the US-Mexico Solidarity Network, Global Exchange, and Chiapas Independent Media Center. From a different perspective, the use of cyberspace by the Zapatistas has been related to a definition of EZLN as the first 'postmodern guerrilla'. This topic is

In May 1998, a year of intensive military activity, a bulletin edited by CIEPAC gave information about 163 military operations occurring in 150 indigenous communities; the construction of 30 new military installations, the deportation of 144 foreigners by the Insituto Nacional de Migración [the Customs and Immigration Office], and a number near to 14, 000 displaced people in Chiapas. The bulletin informed also about the recruitment of additional personnel assigned to this agency and to the public security police corps operating in the following places: the barrio La Hormiga in San Cristobal de las Casas, Taniperlas in Ocosingo, 10 de Abril in Altamirano, Amparo Agua Tinta in Las Margaritas, and the municipal head in Ocosingo (Hidalgo & Castro, 1998). And, in June 2000 Enlace Civil released a bulletin making an emergency call on people for economic support to face the critical food shortage and the lack of grains supplies resulting of the counter-insurgency, and the impossibility of working the land in Chiapas. Data included the weekly amount of food supplies required for the ‘1, 111 communities in resistance’: 20 tons of maize, 5 tons of beans, requiring a total of \$1, 592, 400 pesos (USD\$ 169, 404).<sup>30</sup>

After offering a broad perspective of the reasons, the subjects and the practices involved in the conflict between the EZLN and the Mexican state, in the next pages I want to connect this research agenda to the larger spectrum of culture, class and spatial analysis of contemporary processes of social change, political struggle and resistance.

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analyzed in D. Ronfeldt, et al, *The Zapatista Social Netwar* (Santa Monica: 1998). The book proposes the concept of *social netwar*, which describes the technological revolution that is framing the informatics networks as novel and alternative forms of organization and social coordination.

<sup>30</sup> I consulted this bulletin in 2004 in the archives kept by CIACH in San Cristóbal, but the copy was not dated. Recently I found an electronic version of it at *Asheville Global Report*, No.76, June 29-July 5, 2000.

### **The knitting of class and culture**

In the late 1980s and early 90s the advance of neoliberal globalization is coincident with a theoretical shift from Marxist-inspired political economy approaches towards the examination of culture and cultural identity as key sources for resistance and political mobilization. Categories and concepts such as culture, hegemony, identity, empowerment, displacement, gender, human agency, and so on, began to be common ground to reflect on 'new social movements' and emergent forms of resistance, that it is argued surfaced 'out' of the ground of class struggle and 'in' or closer to the political sphere of civil society and grassroots activism. Scholars like Carl Boggs (1986) made clear that these Post-Marxist paradigms arose first in advanced industrialized societies where scholars were looking to 'endemic' issues such as peace and environment issues, feminism, the quality of urban life, economic stagnation, militarism and nuclear politics, bureaucracy, etcetera. In addition, the author rightly noticed that although these concerns were focused on forms of domination not directly attached to class struggle, yet the majority of them were connected to the sphere of the state power.

The same decade witnessed also a new debate around the cultural project of capitalism, a discussion greatly influenced by Post-structuralism and Post-modern paradigms (Giddens, 1990; Jameson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996). The notion of 'cultural politics', developed in the field of Cultural Studies and later by Postcolonial scholars, made reference to the empowerment of cultural practices and the political repositioning of prior 'marginalized' identities, e.g. of gender, race and ethnicity (Grewal and Caplan, 1994; Hall, 1997; Fernandez, 1997). At the same time, the debate redirected the attention to local-global traits and more grassroots style of activism and coordination for political



action (Alvarez, et al., 1998). The overall focus on cultural practices defined on the other hand, a particular agenda for Postcolonial studies, for instance to discussing experiences of subalternity, counter-hegemony and de-centered forms of resistance in non-industrialized societies and in developing countries. Franz Fanon's work (1965) and his critical view on decolonization and violence strongly influenced postcolonial research analyzing the prevailing discourses on resistance and practices confronting domination at the time.

The influence of this scholarship in Latin America resulted in the creation of the Latin American Group of Subaltern Studies in the late 1990s. Their best-known scholars, Eduardo Mendieta, Santiago Castro and Walter Mignolo (1998) used the notion of 'subalternity' to develop alternative concepts reflecting the impact of the colonial and the neocolonial experience upon the cultural specificities of the region. For instance, in analyzing processes of 'trans-culturalization' in 'trans-nationalized spaces' which are making reference to the 'hybrid' cultural experience resulting from the increasing international migration from developing countries into the major metropolis in developed countries.

In the course of the past decades the possibilities of connecting these new perspectives on culture with the existent perspectives on class and Marxist inspired approaches have meaningfully increased. In this regard, authors like David Harvey and Neil Smith have shown the connection between great changes in capitalism and major theoretical shifts, such as the reassertion of class concerns in the fashioning of identity and culture. In *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), David Harvey pointed out the arising of distinct systems of interpretation and cultural representation related to major

changes in material practice, i.e. the transition into a flexible capitalism and the so-called time-space compression. In a similar fashion, Neil Smith (2000) accounts the 1990s as years of larger transnational capitalist and industrial expansion in East and Southeast Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and South Africa. The impact of this shift searching for cheaper labor force, minimal production costs and the creation of new markets for consumption in emergent capitalist and non-capitalist economies, has been not exclusively economic but as the author points out, it has posed a groundbreaking potential to culture as a means to 'rationalize' economic inequality and class exploitation. Thus race, gender and sexuality are dimensions of social difference and hence of class difference.

### **Indigenous identity and the indigenous question in Latin America**

In the last decade the radicalization of social and political struggles towards anti-neoliberal and anti-US neoliberal policies in Latin America is pushing for the reassertion of the class/culture debate within the sphere of the nation state. It is leading as well to a more critical consideration of the regional and cultural differences, in particular of those related to the rising of social movements and indigenous struggles demanding justice, democratization and autonomy. To some extent, these concerns represent a historical continuity, on the one hand, with the aim of 1970s Dependencista scholars to address the particularities and the processes of social change in the subcontinent within the larger scope of capitalist development and underdevelopment relationships,<sup>31</sup> and with the

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<sup>31</sup> The Dependency School stood as a critical voice against the subordination of Latin American countries to the world economy through the import substitution policies in the era of the so-called 'Benefactor state'. See A.G. Frank, *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution* (New York: 1970); R. Prebisch,

advocates of so-called ‘indigenous question’ in the 1980s, on the other. The latter used Marxist and class-based approaches to analyze the tension between the indigenous peoples and the states within the ‘multi-cultural’ and ‘pluri-ethnic’ nature of the nation states in Latin America.

Nonetheless the fact the multi-cultural and pluri-ethnic nature is related to the past and present existence of indigenous populations in today’s Latin America, the discussion and definition of the categories for ‘the indigenous’, ‘*lo indio*’ (the Indian), or for indigenous identity, have been a constant source of political and academic debate, in particular for pendants of the ‘indigenous question’. Mexican anthropologist Ricardo Pozas (1982) criticized to the ‘Culturalist anthropologists’ for their reification and idealization of ‘*lo indio*’. He argued that Culturalists separated the indigenous communities of the socio-economic relationships, and did not contemplate the incorporation of the communities into the national and the international capitalist mode of production. This analyses lead the anthropologists to justify a ‘comfortably scientific’ position that evaded the exploitation and the situation of misery of the indigenous people: “The quality of *lo indio* is quintessentially derived from the fact the subject named in such a way is the most easily economically exploited man in the system; all the rest, although distinctive and limiting, is secondary” (p.16).

Bonfil Batalla (1991), another anthropologist, examined the question of indigenous identity within the context of major processes of cultural change in Mexico. The category of *lo indio*, he argued, is not as a reified or fixed category, it is rather referring to a ‘sense of belonging’ and to an organized collectivity that has been ‘created’

and transformed historically. This process of change, however, is structurally associated to the uneven process of colonization from which the notion of *lo indio* has been externally imposed to designate ‘the colonized’, ‘the subaltern’, and the ‘dominated subject’. The history of the last 500 years in Mexico, he concludes, is the history of the confrontation between two civilizations and two cultural projects: the ‘Imaginary Mexico’ –representing the dominant and excluding project of the Western civilization, and the Deep Mexico –which corresponds to the dominated project, the Mesoamerican project, in short, the indigenous Mexico.

Historians, such as Florescano (1996) and Gilly (2002), have similarly argued for a produced ‘hybrid’ or ‘syncretic’ indigenous identity in analyzing the conflictive long-term building of the nation states in Latin America. The European colonization of the Americas and the resulting ‘triple segregation’ of the indigenous (territorial, juridical and linguistic) forced by the colonial institutions, says Florescano, were crucial for the project of creating collective identities (the ‘hybrid’ indigenous identity included), and for using them to forge an idea of the nation according to the idea of the dominant elites. The imposition of this idea meant the practical dispossession of the indigenous of their communal lands, their reduction to a labour force subordinated to the needs of the Colonial economy, and the insertion of the Indians ‘at the bottom’ of the economic and political class structure. After the Independence (1824), he continues, the construction of the nation was based on the liberal (Republican) project, which in turn intended to create a single (homogeneous) nation whereby the negation of both ‘the indigenous nation’ and ‘the New Spain’.

Respectively, on his analysis of the post revolutionary period, Gilly argues that the historical praxis of exploitation and asymmetrical power relations imposed upon the Indians was fitted into a process of transforming them into ‘citizens’. The entire indigenous ‘cultural universe’ (territory, language, and history) was ‘assimilated’ and ‘absorbed’ into the institutions of the modern state, for instance with the agrarian reform and the creation of ‘peasant’ ‘communities’, the *indigenista* policies, the system of public education, state protection and corporate economic development.

In the same token, pendants of the so-called ‘ethno-national question’ have contributed to extend a Marxist analysis of the relationships between the indigenous peoples and the political structures of the nation state. For Bate (1988), the recognition of ‘cultural identity’ can be a means to unify the ethnic groups for political struggle, but this unity is not sufficient to embrace the totality of a (autonomous) political project. It is necessary to address the class tensions, and hence to build the necessary (class) alliances to take on such political project. For Díaz Polanco (1997) the ‘ethnic question’ is not independent of class structure but it is the result of it. The ‘coexistence’ of the different national groups integrating the nation state is based on the deliberate exclusion of the ethnic groups of the political structures and of the historical project of the nation state:

There where the national matrix is socio-culturally heterogeneous, the social transformations looking for a more democratic and just society, must be projected to re-arrange the socio-economic relations among its class components, and at the same time, to re-define the position and the role of the socio-cultural groups that are defined by particular identities. This last re-definition precisely implies the definition of some kind of autonomic regime (p.146).

López y Rivas (2004) has critically situated the 1980s ‘ethno-national debate’ as intended to confront the use of anthropological knowledge to justify the state *indigenista* policies that looked for ‘the assimilation’ (linguistic and cultural homogenization) of the indigenous people in accordance with the ‘bourgeois project’ for the nation.

Consequently, the *indigenista* policies have also embraced the practical elimination of the cultural means they have maintained for social and political reproduction.

Complementary to these critical analyses of indigenous identity assuming not an intrinsic content of the category but inquiring on the uneven process of (re)creating the meaning and the practices defining an idea of ‘lo indio’ (forms of organization, language and sense of territoriality), there is an understanding of indigenous identity as a historical continuum and a constant recreation of the indigenous cultural universe for resisting domination, and as a means to defend the indigenous collective survival. For instance, García de León (1994, Vol.1) has analyzed the ‘hybrid’ formation of indigenous identity in Chiapas in relation to the existence of the colonizer but very meaningfully in regard to the resistance of the indigenous to colonization and the extended periods of the indigenous rebellions in Chiapas. The author included the example of the ‘religious syncretism’ that characterizes indigenous identity (European Catholic and indigenous). On the one hand, Evangelization forced the ‘hispanization’ or homogenization of the indigenous whereby imposing the hierarchical Colonial conception of the world to them. But on the other hand, he explains how religion was also re-appropriated by the indigenous as a means of (cultural) resistance whereby the use of biblical motives and symbols to represent their own customs and myths (as the cult to the Virgin of Guadalupe and to the Saint Patrons).

Focusing in contemporary strategic and political use of indigenous identity, authors such as Díaz Polanco (1997), analyze the centrality of the demand of autonomy for today's indigenous movements in Latin America. According to the author, autonomy (understood as the right to cultural diversity and territory) is crucial in the case of Mexico and for the Zapatista rebellion in the larger context of the threat posed by globalization upon the existence of the indigenous peoples (e.g. with the liberation of the collective control of the indigenous land and resources allowed by the reform to Art.27 in 1989, and with NAFTA). He concludes that the national character of the indigenous movements (as in Nicaragua, or in Mexico with the EZLN rebellion) is also a major qualitative change.

A similar perspective on the impact of neoliberal economic restructuring in Mexico upon the causes of the Zapatista uprising can be found in Collier (1994), and Nash (1995, 1997). The former, examine the social, political, economic and religious ethnic history of Chiapas, and especially the impact of macro-economic policies upon peasant agriculture, and for the primarily definition of the Zapatista rebellion as a peasant rebellion. And Nash focuses the engagement of contemporary approaches with the ethnic reassertion and the promotion of a pluricultural approach for the defense of indigenous peoples cultural diversity (1995). And particularly with the reassertion of the 'Maya indigenous identity' in the Zapatista rebellion in regard to more universal ideals (1997):

In their redefinition of the modernist ideals of justice, liberty, and democracy, Mayas of the southern-most state of Chiapas are revising these concepts for a postmodern age. As they mobilize to assert their rights to land, political participation, and their distinctive cultures, they are transforming the basis of their ethnic identity from fragmented, ethnically distinct communities to pluricultural coexistence in regional and national arenas (p.261).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> On the topic of cultural identity, there are other interesting theoretical contributions at the time, such as Friedman (1992), who focuses the construction of identity as a process of empowerment and self-

Last but not least, today's discussions on social movements in the region are dealing with similar debates on class and culture politics, and are opening the field to comparative approaches on the connection of globalization, neoliberalism and indigenous movements in a variety of geographical backgrounds, the creation of new cultural and transnational identities, democratization and political participation, resistance movements, governance and gender, among others. Latin America is one of the regions of the world where the neoliberal policies were first launched and imposed first by means of military dictatorships –in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay in the 1970-80s. But today Latin America is a social laboratory where societies are thinking, questioning and acting against neoliberal globalization. Although the demands in each country are necessarily different, still there is a recognizable tendency to pushing forward to transform the relationship between the government and the civil society, as well as to coordinate political opposition and possible alliances in the entire region.<sup>33</sup>

Authors, like Alvarez et al. (1998), have pointed out the materialization of 'culturally specific' notions of politics and 'the political' in the region and how these notions are contesting and re-signifying the meanings and practices of citizenship, civil society, political representation and participation in Latin American countries.<sup>34</sup> Li

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positioning within specific historical and social contexts interacting with larger global dynamics. And also Ferguson & Gupta (1992), who introduced the spatial dimension to analyze processes of territorialization and deterritorialization of cultural identity and difference in contemporary globalization.

<sup>33</sup> Relevant examples include the *Sem Terra* peasant movement in Brazil, the civil resistance of the *piqueteros* in Argentina, the indigenous resistance in Bolivia against the privatization of natural resources, or the openly socialist-oriented presidency of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. More recently, Luis Hernández Navarro (2006), Chief coordinator of Opinion in the Mexico daily *La Jornada*, summarized the major topics discussed for Latin America in the Sixth World Social Forum in Venezuela: 1) the complex relationship between popular movements and progressive governments; 2) the US imperialism; 3) the transformation in Venezuela, and 4) the triumph of Evo Morales in Bolivia.

<sup>34</sup> For a comparative analysis of indigenous movements also see Yashar (1998), which analyses the use of indigenous identity as a source of political organizing and struggle in cases in Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, and Mexico.



(2000), analyses the ‘articulation’ of indigenous identity and the ‘responses’ of rural communities to global processes in other developing countries. Her analysis of two cases in Indonesia shades a light in the complex intertwining of agency and structural local, national and global constraints in shaping contemporary ‘tribal’ or ‘indigenous’ slots. And so she argues against simplistic arguments condemning these movements by alleging a political pragmatism in the use indigenous identity for promoting collective action:

a group’s self-identification as tribal or indigenous is not natural or inevitable, but neither it is simply invented, adopted, or imposed. It is, rather, a *positioning* which draws upon sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle. The conjunctures at which (some) people come to identify themselves as indigenous, realigning the ways they connect to the nation the government, and their own, unique tribal place, are the contingent products of agency and the cultural and political work of *articulation* (151).

And finally, Edelman (2001) offers a twofold perspective on recent studies of collective action in Latin America. On the one hand, he critically questions the absence of important topics for the region, such as the peasant movements (even in Mexico with the ‘clustered geographical’ focus on the Zapatista struggle), and in spite of the greater importance these movements have had as ‘the forefront of opposition to neoliberalism’ in other countries in Central America and Brazil. And on the other hand, he recognizes the need to reinvigorate scholarly and ethnographical research on social movements, and to take advantage of the newest historical and cultural processes that are impacting identity politics, such as the reassertion of the state and democratization processes, cyberpolitics, grassroots and transnational activist networks, and so on.

### **Zapatismo and new research threads**

In this discussion broadly exploring interdisciplinary views on contemporary struggles that more and more are focusing universal concerns about democratization and social justice in neoliberal globalization, 'Zapatismo' has become an archetype of new popular political struggle or new social activism. For example, Burbach (2001) argues that (as with Zapatismo) this new politics pointing out to new styles of social mobilization and forms of democratic development as well as the use of new organizing strategies, is characteristic of today's struggles and strives resisting globalization. Jeffries (2001), explores the EZLN's use of informational technologies and the media to advance popular struggles on the international level, as well as the involvement of the Zapatismo in creating alternative global networks of resistance. Similar perspectives on the EZLN and the anti-globalization movements began to gain attention in *The Battle of Seattle* (2001). In it two Callahan and Katsiaficas highlight the role of the Zapatista uprising as a precursor of the grassroots anti-globalizations protests during the third WTO's World Ministerial Conference in Seattle, Washington in 1999. In *International Zapatismo* (2005), Olesen examines the development of a transnational 'Zapatista solidarity network' consisting of emails, websites and listserves that have been inspired by the EZLN (especially in the U.S. and Europe), and the author uses the example of Zapatismo to examine new global 'patterns of interaction' characterizing today's civil society actors.

The rise of comparative studies and extensive ethnographic research done by U.S. scholars on Chiapas and the EZLN is also of note. June Nash's *Mayan Visions* (2001) is among the first and most important anthropological views of the impact of local and transnational processes in the ways of life in Chiapas. It centers the EZLN's quest to

achieve indigenous autonomy and its emphasis on human dignity as a reaction to specific processes derived of globalization, e.g. deterritorialization, the fragmentation of social relations, and the loss of the symbolic and material reference points to cultural (indigenous) identity. Nash also suggests a spatial approach to analyze the cultural production of ‘spaces of representation’ (religious spaces, spaces of solidarity, electronic spaces) and the ‘symbolic warfare’ (discursive warfare) characterizing the transformation of the local and regional power relationships in the Lacandona jungle.

In a similar fashion, Lynn Stephen’s *Zapata Lives!* (2002) is focused on the historical and political contexts of the ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Zapatismo in the states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, and discusses the formation and mobilization of ‘cultural symbols’ in shaping ideas of the nation and of nationalism in Mexico. Using the cases of Oaxaca, and the *ejidos* of Guadalupe Tepeyac and La Realidad, in Eastern Chiapas, she takes insights into the use of these produced symbols in the responses of local communities to the neoliberal economic government policy, and discusses these responses in the larger context of contemporary Mexico after the 2000 elections. And similarly focused on cultural identity and collective action, Shannan Mattiace’s *To see with two eyes* (2003) examines the politization of the Indian identity around the demand of autonomy. She analyses the case of the Tojolabal region in the municipality of Las Margaritas in Chiapas, considered a model for the creation of regional autonomous zones.

In some cases, comparative analyses have lead to closer academic collaboration between U.S. and Mexican scholars. *Tierra, Libertad y Autonomía* (Mattiace, et al., 2002), and *Mayan Lives, Mayan Utopias* (Rus, et al., 2003) are two good examples of

this collaborative relationship.<sup>35</sup> These works are organized around ethnographic research of the regional impacts of Zapatismo and different autonomic experiences in Las Cañadas, Chenalhó, the Tojolabal region, and the Mame communities of Sierra Motozintla in Chiapas. A similar approach can be found in *Antipode*. In it the work of Ana Esther Ceceña (1994) highlights three aspects that are crucial to the ‘Zapatista revolution’: 1) the recovery of history and territory as organizers of the creation of meaning. 2) The notion of everyday events as ‘spaces’ for constructing the revolutionary ‘utopia’. 3) The recognition of this utopia in the imagination and collective feeling of ‘a world with room for all words’. In addition, Seoane and Zibechi (1994) underscore the influence of the Zapatista uprising in contemporary popular struggle in Argentina in 2001.

Finally, Earle and Simonelli’s *Uprising of Hope* (2005) is one of the latest and most compelling contributions. It reflects on and documents the major shift that is taking place in doing ethnographic research in Chiapas as a result of the organization and working of the Zapatista Good Government. The authors shared the experience of gaining permission to do research in the Zapatista municipality of Tierra y Libertad, and the accounting of this experience, as they point out, is as important as the very results of the investigation. The indigenous communities “are not longer the benign recipients of anthropological scrutiny” (10), but rather they have become an active participant in the control and the direction given to the research and results. In analyzing the Zapatista autonomy, the authors focus community-level resistance in Cerro Verde and Tulan in the Tojolabal region as experiments of so-called alternative economic logic (according to

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<sup>35</sup> The former is the result of previous research done by authors who are very well known for their scholarship of Chiapas (e.g. Leyva, Rus, Burguete Cal y Mayor, and Hernández Castillo). See *Latin American Perspectives* (Issue 117, March 2001).

them, a model of smallholder development that asserts the possibility of ‘self-sufficiency’ and ‘self-governing’ rural communities in the context of globalization).

In a more theoretical vein, it is worthy of note the contributions in which the analysis of the Zapatista rebellion is complementary to the attempts of developing new perspectives. Examples include, Holloway (2002), who is proposing to substitute the concept of revolution for ‘revolutionary politics’, as to underline how the source of revolutionary politics starts from the very ordinary level of the refusal (the ‘No’) that is an integral part of living in a capitalist society. The affirmation of this ordinary refusal to ‘struggling against what is being denied’, he argues, is central to the Zapatista rebellion and to its conceptualization of ‘dignity’. Higgins (2004) uses Foucault’s notion of the ‘governmentalisation’ of the state to explore the history of the major transformations in the political subjectivity of the Mexican state, and of the ‘Subjugated’ Indian identity and resistance. The author concludes for the EZLN that this indigenous uprising is “a disruption of the totalizing and individualizing aspects at work within the modern governmentalized state project” (op. cit.). In other words, it is a conflict between “different historical and cultural self-understandings and the power embodied within each” (185). And Ferguson (2006), whose analysis of Africa’s contemporary politics and Africa’s ‘place-in-the-world’, is elaborated as a critique to the categorical system of ‘old frameworks’ of nationalism and development in explaining the emergence of ‘new politics’ and ‘new forms of ‘transnational governmentality’. Furthermore, he uses the EZLN rebellion as a complementary example that challenges the notion of ‘grassroots’ movements and so to illustrate the need of re-thinking the role of the states and of political resistance in contemporary politics. In contrast, Mentinis (2006) analyzes ‘the

failure' of the Zapatista revolt to bring about radical change and to fulfill the Zapatista's 'reformist' political agenda in Mexico. The author's elaborated critique of what he identifies are the main existing theoretical works on the Zapatistas (Gramscian, Marxists, Discourse approaches, and Non-Academic Radical Left Perspectives) is doubtless an interesting contribution to its aim of theorizing radical politics.<sup>36</sup>

Last but not least, the contribution of investigative journalism (Muñoz, 2004; Ross, 2006), the editorial work gathered in Readers and translations of major documents, communiqués and literature works of EZLN (Ponce de León, 2000; Hayden, 2002; Vodovnik, 2004, Subcomandante Marcos, 2006) continue to be a timely reference in following the latest stages of the EZLN rebellion, as well as to offer to the U.S. public opinion the perspective of international intellectuals, journalist and writers on the EZLN rebellion.<sup>37</sup>

### **The revolutionary nature of the EZLN**

In this general discussion, the case of the EZLN struggle has been, however, particularly defined as a 'revolution for human dignity'. Different positions can be found on this particular approach, yet the following are some of these ideas that can be of use to further examine the relationship between revolution, dignity, and space, which will be analyzed in the next and last section.<sup>38</sup> Neil Harvey (1998) introduced a compelling idea about the

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<sup>36</sup> However, in analyzing transnational politics and social movements there are also some misleading comparative perspectives that are fashioning the EZLN simply as an 'opportunistic' indigenous movement using marketing techniques to attract NGOs and overseas support, such as Clifford's *The Marketing of rebellion* (New York: 2005).

<sup>37</sup> In the same vein of journalism, there is also a very interesting article that explores both the momentum and the declining of Zapatismo in the U.S. See Brooks and Cason, "De Seattle al Pentágono" (*Perfil*: 2004).

<sup>38</sup> In this regard, it is also of note the particular aim to situate or differentiate the EZLN of previous rebellions and guerrilla movements in Latin America, which to a large extent were fashioned by opposite features such as the centrality of class concerns, the attempt to take-over state power or, the individual

nature of Zapatismo when he addressed the tension between the ‘possibility’ and the ‘impossibility’ of this struggle to exist:

What makes Zapatismo possible is precisely what makes it impossible. The great novelty of the EZLN is that they have recognized this dilemma, this impossibility of being, of existing, of finishing their walk, and have transformed it into their strongest weapon. The impossibility of finishing inevitably leaves space for the interventions of participants, and more importantly, of those that will participate in the future (p.252).

Here, the connection of Zapatismo to the future, and of the fate of this future to the intervention of other participants, introduces a concrete sense of motion that in turn is related to another critical quality of Zapatismo: the great space it has opened to the political contribution of civil society and hence to political improvisation. A conclusion that also can be inferred from this early EZLN’s political statement:

If the first of January was a surprise for you, the second of January was the real surprise for us. One way or another, you and us have been thinking apart. We have believed you were the vanguard, and you have thought we were your leaders. You have been waiting for us to tell you what to do; and us, waiting for you to tell us what to do (quoted in Correa and Ramírez, 1994, p.7).

King and Villanueva (1998) have defined the EZLN as a revolutionary ‘community’ which sense of direction is given by the ultimate goal of succeeding the praxis of the political represented by the state (the ‘state community’). However, even though the authors’ sense of praxis connects the revolution of the EZLN with the question of power, this revolution is nonetheless not about taking power:

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leadership of ‘cuadillos’, like in the Cuban revolution in the 1960s, the peasant and urban guerrillas in Mexico in the ‘70s, or the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in the ‘80s.

Taking power means that a new community takes control of the institutions formerly used by the old community to exercise its power, thus displacing and reducing the old community. A revolutionary community cannot do this [...]. The Zapatistas do not propose to take power, but rather to develop the community they represent to the utmost. The power that this implies is a form of power based on the direct democracy ('command obeying') of all those seeking community satisfaction of communal needs ('everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves') (p.107).

For Holloway (1998), the EZLN struggle is a 'revolt of dignity' (a rebellion based on the unity of moral, politics and human dignity). According to the author, the singularity of this conception relies not simply in the ideological centrality of dignity, but in the fact this centrality has been the practical outcome of a learning process. A process whereby the EZLN's initial revolutionary thought was radically transformed and enhanced as a result of the contact with the indigenous communal everyday practices. The whole conception of revolution, he said, 'became turned outwards', in other words, the EZLN was taught 'to hear the voice of the communities' and 'to walk with them'. And this thought opposes to the traditional politics where the army leads and is placed above the communities:

*'Preguntando caminamos* – asking we walk' becomes a central principle of the revolutionary movement, the radically democratic concept at the centre of the Zapatista call for 'freedom, democracy and justice'. The revolution advances by asking, not by telling; or perhaps even, revolution *is* asking instead of telling, the dissolution of power relations. [...] The revolt of dignity forces us to think of revolution in a new way, as a rebellion that cannot be defined or confined, a rebellion that overflows, a revolution that is by its very nature ambiguous and contradictory (p.164).

In a similar fashion, Adolfo Gilly (1997) has suggested to examine the Zapatista rebellion in the light of 'the cultural construction' of the greatest political community: the



state. Culture, as economic relations, he sustains, is a material force shaping the ideas and the representations of the state. From this perspective, rebellion is culture, 'the culture of rebellion', that is a material force of society that is opposing the practices and the representations of the state. In Gilly's cultural re-construction of rebellion, two qualitative shifts are important. First, a qualitative transformation in which the 'agrarian community' –with its hierarchies, beliefs, values and internal networks of social relationships– is recognized as the subject that is in revolt; and second, the unfolding of the central demand for dignity into its moral and political contents. On the one hand, as the supreme demand human beings must be treated with respect), and on the other hand, as a demand of the indigenous peoples for 'belonging' and citizenship, i.e. a claiming for the right to 'name', to 'represent' and to be a part of the nation state.

Finally, Camú and Duano (1994) argued that the EZLN's demand for dignity is 'revolutionary' in itself so long it involves particular notions of respect, political participation, freedom of speech, and self-determination that are being decided by the very indigenous communities. For the authors, the revolutionary nature of the EZLN relies also in the 'merit' of the indigenous communities of having achieved that the EZLN (being a military, vertical and hierarchical organization) had yield to be under the rule and the political 'democratic' direction of the communities' assemblies. From this perspective, the internal organization of the indigenous communities to exercise power is seen as another revolutionary quality.

### **The revolutionary nature of space**

Jan de Vos (2002) described the Lacandona in Chiapas as the part of Mexico which in the past five decades experienced the most dramatic changes in at least six major areas of human life: peasant migration, environmental degradation, popular mobilization, religious and political conflicts, and armed insurgency. After 1994, the space of the Lacandona became the heart of a war ‘conflict zone’, a space delimited by the government in order to military encircle the Zapatista communities. Today the Lacandona constitutes the core of the so-called Zapatista Rebel Territory, a space delimited by the EZLN to peacefully resist the military violence and building up indigenous autonomy. This dramatic transformation may have several implications to think on the meaning of political resistance but of space and dignity as well. But as I will argue in the coming chapters, for the EZLN the ultimate purpose of mobilizing resistance across space, or even the necessity of creating spaces for alternative ways of political organization and struggle, must be thought within the fundamental tension confronting the indigenous peoples against the state. As the EZLN itself has addressed:

You [the Supreme Government] must disappear, because what you represent is a historical aberration, a human negation and a cynic cruelty; you must disappear also because you represent an insult to intelligence. You made us possible; you caused us to grow. We are your contrary; we are your Siamese opposite. For us to disappear, you must disappear too (*Documentos y Comunicados*, Vol.2, p.147).

In this general context, resistance at first can be understood as a practice opposing hegemonic and domination relationships tied to ethnicity, culture or class. However, if connecting to revolution, resistance became a means for political struggle. As Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (1980) has pointed out, political struggle presupposes the development

of a political consciousness \_and hence of a political subject around the ultimate necessity of radical social transformation.<sup>39</sup> From this perspective, it is true that resistance can be expressed in one or various cultural forms (as in the case of indigenous identity). However, even though this cultural form may lead to a common cause for resistance, it will be necessary to eventually take on the transformation of the material relationships that are reproducing the oppression, exclusion, exploitation and domination relationships.

In the same token, just as resistance requires the development of a political consciousness, it can be argued it could result in the development of a spatial consciousness, i.e. it can lead to a collective awareness about the political nature of space for social transformation. In this regard, authors like Steve Pile and Michael Keith (1997), have explored the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies to examine ‘the spaces of struggle’ resulting from the spatialization of empowered cultural identities (in the transmigrant communities, transnational diasporas, and in religious fundamentalisms and nationalisms). And they have especially paid attention to role of resistance in the ‘re-symbolization’ of spaces, i.e. in the transformation of the oppressive nature of space into a domain for political mobilization. Don Mitchell (2000) has analyzed the conflict between the politics of cultural representation and the utilization of space for political representation. David Slater (1998) has pointed out that for contemporary social movements both ‘spatial imagination’ and the ‘geopolitical memory’ are essential in the discussion of any critical political project.

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<sup>39</sup> This ultimate practical goal of revolution is according to Sánchez Vázquez, the basis of the philosophy of praxis, a reflection that centers the necessity to reflect about social emancipation as the major practical goal or liberation content of Marxism. His perspective on Marxism as a ‘philosophy of praxis’ constitutes one of the most important critiques and greatest contributions to the development of a humanist thinking in Spain and Latin America. See *Filosofía de la Praxis* (Mexico: 1980).

A more profound meaning of the relationship between space and social transformation arises if space is understood both as a result as much as a producer of the tensions drawing and reproducing the fundamental workings of society. As Henri Lefebvre proposed in *The Production of Space* (1984), the act of creating, producing and appropriating space is a social production. He discussed these abstractions in connection to what he considered were the most important affairs of 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘modern neocapitalist’ societies: the state, violence/power/subversion, and class struggle. Today, more than ever, he said, class struggle “is inscribed on space” (p.55). From this perspective, and now following Marx on his definition of labour as an interactive process whereby men transform its own consciousness,<sup>40</sup> and likewise following him on his reflection about the practical nature of social life,<sup>41</sup> it can be argued that the production of space, as an act of transforming nature, could thereby result in a practical reflection about the nature of such transformation either for domination and resistance.

Likewise, space cannot be reduced to a set of forms and contents structurally determined but rather it is the result of a creative process and hence, it equally entails the possibility of using human imagination for emancipatory ends. In *The Urban Revolution* (1963), where Lefebvre discussed the different levels of space to analyze the urban phenomenon, he proposed the metaphor of ‘the world upside-down’ in order to describe the dominance of the class rationality in organizing space in the capitalist world. Space is

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<sup>40</sup> “Labour is, first of all, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates, and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces that belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature” (*Capital*, Volume One, p.284).

<sup>41</sup> “Social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which mislead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice” (Marx’s VIII Thesis on Feuerbach. In Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p.143).

dominated by ‘the global level’, which corresponds to the sphere where state power is exerted, represented, and imposed over the other levels (‘the urban’ and the ‘private’). The fundamental tension between these levels determines, on the one hand, the production and reproduction of the dominant spatial order,<sup>42</sup> but it on the other hand, allows the possibility that men and women to use imagination and ‘escape’ the global class rationality of space:

This means that the relation of the “human being” to nature and its own nature, to “being” and its own being, is situated in habiting, is realized and read there. [...] The human being cannot build and dwell, that is to say, possess a dwelling in which he lives, without also possessing something more (or less) than himself: his relation to the possible and the imaginary (p.83).

The topic of space and social transformation has been a constant issue in David Harvey’s work, from his earlier arguments on the politics of difference (*Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference*, 1996), to the analysis of neoliberal globalization as a U.S. imperialist class project (*A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2005). However, it is in *Spaces of Hope* (2000) where he particularly discusses the importance of the ‘human capacity of speculation’ (ideas, ideologies, moral views) in exploring socio-spatial alternatives and future forms of social life. The ‘distinctively human nature’ lays in the possibility that men can be the ‘architects of our futures and our fates,’ (p.206). In a similar fashion, in *Uneven Development* (1990) Neil Smith made an extensive reflection on the development of ideas and concepts about nature and space in capitalism, and closes his analysis with the possibilities of space for revolution: “Capitalism has always

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<sup>42</sup> In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote about this class rationality in a different way, when examining the ‘revolutionary capabilities’ of the bourgeoisie to create a world ‘before their own image’ and hence of transforming the world according to the ‘spiritual power’ of the ruling class –their ideology, their religion, their moral, and consequently, their spatial needs.

been a fundamentally geographical project. It may not be too soon to suggest, and I hope not too late, that the revolt against capitalism should itself be ‘planning something geographical’” (p.178).

Similarly, Brazilian geographer Milton Santos worked on the idea of the production of space. In *El presente como espacio* (2002), he proposed concepts like ‘techno-sphere’ and ‘psycho-sphere’ to theorize about the dominance of techniques and the capacity of ideology ‘to become a material force’ in present capitalist societies. Santos saw this transformation as particularly dangerous for the underdeveloped countries where ideology was preceding the mode of production, and therefore was becoming by an instrument of penetration for the new modes of production. Finally, on his examination of the production of space (as the materialization of specific class relations) he called for the necessity of constructing a ‘truly human space’:

We must prepare ourselves to build the bases of a truly human space, to create a space that can unite men to work together for labour but not to quickly divide them in classes, to separate them in oppressed and oppressors; an inert matter-space that can be worked by men but cannot be turn against them; a nature-social space released to the direct contemplation of human beings and not a fetish-space; a instrumental-space for the reproduction of life, and not a commodity worked by another commodity, the fetishized men (p.30).

However, it is again Lefebvre’s proposal about the production of space, which draws the attention to the production of meanings, concepts and consciousnesses about space that are inseparable from its physical production, what leads me to push these spatial arguments to its ultimate consequences and arguing –as he does– for a causal relationship between social transformation and the ultimate goal of producing a ‘revolutionary space’:

A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses. A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space – though its impact need not occur at the same rate, or with equal force, in each of these areas (1984, p.54).

The question of a ‘revolutionary space’ indeed introduced additional concerns to analyze the EZLN’s concrete demand to construct a ‘space of dignity’. Yet, as I intend to explore in the subsequent chapters, so far the Zapatista notion of a ‘space of dignity’ is not referring to an abstract space but it has been the result of material practice. And so the possible forms and contents of such idea of space ought to be inquired by looking first to the concrete conceptual and practical levels of the Zapatista struggle.

### CHAPTER THREE THE STAR, THE HAND AND THE BADGER

El problema con la globalización es que los globos se revientan. —**Subcomandante Marcos.**<sup>43</sup>

#### A jigsaw puzzle

How can a dollar sign, a triangle, a circle, a rectangle, a pentagon, a scribble and a pocket be pieced together to form an accurate picture of the world? What is the meaning of the Tzeltal word ‘ach-yuúntayel-slojtakín’? How are these questions connected? In order to resolve the first puzzle it is necessary to draw, to color and cut out the different pieces. The solution? The pieces do not fit. And for the second question, the proposed meaning for this Tzeltal word in Spanish is ‘la nueva subordinación a la ganancia’ or, the new subordination to profit. In the light of these short and apparently disconnected answers it is however difficult to figure out the relationship between these questions. But an answer may arise if we look to the whole problem from a different perspective.

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<sup>43</sup> The expression makes sense only in Spanish. It is a word puzzle playing with the words *globalización* (globalization) and *globos* (balloons). An inaccurate translation of the phrase into English would be though ‘the problem in globalization (globalización) is that balloons (globos) blow up (se revientan)’.



In 1994, the declaration of war of the EZLN with the Mexican government was not the only turmoil in the country. The rebellion started on the same day NAFTA went into effect on the first day of January. On March 23, Luis Donaldo Colosio (the PRI's presidential candidate) was assassinated in Lomas Taurinas in the outskirts of Tijuana. In August, the left presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas denounced a major electoral fraud in the presidential elections, yet Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (the PRI's substitute candidate) was declared as the official winner and eventually appointed as President at the end of the year. On September 28, another *priísta* (PRI member or representative) figure, José Francisco Ruiz Massieu (the PRI's Secretary General) was assassinated in Mexico City. Nevertheless, none of these events were so critical as to require external aid or a direct intervention of the U.S. government, as it subsequently happened in late December when the Mexican 'Nuevo' peso entered into a system of floating exchange rates provoking the biggest financial crisis in the country's contemporary history.<sup>44</sup>

According to Springer and Molina (1995) by the end of 1994 the investment assets and the international reserves vanished dramatically from the country. On December 19, investors withdrew more than \$3 billion from Mexico's capital market and in the aftermath 'fear' overtook the market:

to such an extent that Mexico's international reserves plunged sharply downward: falling from \$17 billion (at the end of November) to less than \$6 billion in just two days. As it turned out, the Mexican government was no longer in a position to resist another speculative attack on the peso. On 22 December 1994, without the

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<sup>44</sup> At the time the monetary unit was the 'Nuevo Peso'. In June 22, 1992, then President Carlos Salinas signed a presidential decree to create the 'Nuevo' peso, which circulated from January of 1993 to 1996. The new parity was established \$1000 = N\$1. In January of 1996, the peso returned as the monetary unit and the parity was fixed again as N\$1 = 1\$ . See Banco de México (Circular No.1995/2).

acquiescence of either business or labor, the government adopted a system of floating exchange rates, and the peso fell to nearly N\$6:US1.<sup>45</sup>

The authors assert that the crisis was a result of, not only of internal financial instability but also the concern of international financial markets that Mexico would not be able to meet \$10 billion in payments on its government bonds (Tesobonos) for even the first quarter of 1995. On February 1 of 1995, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a financial assistance package of US\$17.8 billion: “the largest-ever financing package approved by the IMF for a member country both in terms of the amount and the overall percentage of quota.” The credit was announced, according to the same source, as an exceptional action to provide “an adequate international response to Mexico’s financial crisis and create confidence within the international financial system” (IMF, *Press Release*, No.95/10, 1995). The conditions of the IMF loan centered on a policy of wage, price, and credit restraint and on fiscal policies that meant an even more severe subordination of the Mexican state to far-reaching neoliberal macroeconomic and structural reforms. This credit was part of near US\$53 billion received by the Mexican government between an assistance package from the U.S., international financing, and the IMF loan.<sup>46</sup>

In the third DSL (released January 1, 1995) the EZLN condemned the financial crisis and the profound social and political polarization in the country. The national crisis,

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<sup>45</sup> In the same article, Springer & Molina suggest other important connections, first, to clarify that the speculative attacks on the peso were not a consequence of the EZLN rebellion but were the ‘natural outcome of the opening of the Mexican economy and financial system throughout the Salinas administration’. And second, to suggest that the instability in November was precipitated as “investors reacted to their concern that the NAFTA, then under hot debate by the U.S. Congress, might not be approved” (op. cit.).

<sup>46</sup> The package included funds from the U.S. Exchange Stabilization Fund, the Bank for International Settlements, commercial bank loans, and Latin American and Canadian credit facilities (Ibid).

as it was denounced in the document, was the result of neoliberalism, which for the same reason has ever since defined by the EZLN as a form of state violence against the nation:

At the end of 1994 the economic farce with which Salinas had deceived the Nation and the international economy exploded. The nation of money called the grand gentlemen of power and arrogance to dinner, and they did not hesitate in betraying the soil and sky in which they prospered with Mexican blood. The economic crisis awoke Mexicans from the sweet and stupefying dream of entry into the first world. The nightmare of unemployment, scarcity and misery will now be even more wearing for the majority of Mexicans. 1994, the year that has just ended, has just shown the real face of the brutal system that dominates us. The economic, political, social and repressive program of neo-liberalism has demonstrated its inefficiency, its deceptions, and the cruel injustice that is its essence. Neoliberalism as a doctrine and as a reality should be flung into the trash heap of national history (*third Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle*).

With time, neoliberalism became a central concern for the EZLN's political project. The Zapatistas began to assert their demands by addressing the negative effects of neoliberalism on a global scale. For example, with organization of the first Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, held in the Lacandona jungle in 1996. The encounter was as a peaceful demonstration to denounce the state violence against the indigenous peoples in Chiapas, as well as to call on people to organize a large-scale peaceful international resistance against neoliberalism:

When we began this dream that today is finally realize in La Realidad [one of the five Aguascalientes] we thought that it will fail. We thought that perhaps we could reunite dozens of people from a few countries. We were wrong. Like always, we were wrong. There were not some dozes but thousand of human beings coming from the five continents to face the reality of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (*Crónicas Intergalácticas*, 1998, p.262).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Here the utilization of 'La Realidad' and 'la realidad' is totally on purpose in order to emphasize the contrast between the (social) reality addressed by the Zapatista struggle in La Realidad, and the violence of the neoliberal reality. The word 'r(R)ealidad' is also translated to English as 'reality'.

Furthermore, in the encounter, the Zapatistas addressed ‘the power of money’ as the ‘greatest strength’ of neoliberalism, and so they developed the phrase ‘ach-yuúntayel-slojtakín’ (in Tzeltal) to define neoliberalism as ‘la nueva subordinación a la ganancia’ (the new subordination to profit). And hence, they symbolically opposed ‘the force of the work and the dignity of the indigenous people’ as the greatest strength of their struggle to overcome neoliberalism.

Nevertheless, in this large picture of the meaning and the effects of neoliberalism in Mexico, there is still no noticeable solution to the original question of how piecing together a dollar sign, a triangle, a circle, a rectangle, a pentagon, a scribble and a pocket to form an accurate picture of the world. Subcomandante Marcos firstly laid out this puzzle in *The Seven Loose pieces of the Global Jigsaw Puzzle* (1997). In it he depicts neoliberal globalization as a jigsaw puzzle of seven loose pieces. The first piece is constructed by drawing a dollar sign, “Here you have the symbol of economic power”. Then he goes on picturing the other six pieces: a triangle, as the pyramid of global exploitation; a circle, as the ring of the nightmare of global migration; a rectangle, as a mirror where legal and illegal businesses exchanges as one of the same; a pentagon, as a symbol of North American military power; a scribble, that represents the megapolitics, and a pocket, as a symbol of resistance. The resulting picture is an incoherent image of the world: “the pieces do not fit”, and this is the problem with neoliberal globalization:

There are, no doubt, more pieces of the neoliberal jigsaw puzzle. For example: the media, culture, pollution, pandemics. We only wanted to show you here the profiles of 7 of them. These 7 are enough so that you, after you draw, color and cut them out, can see that it is impossible to put them together. And this is the problem of the world which globalization pretends to construct: the pieces don't fit. For this and other reasons that do not fit into the space of this text, it is

necessary to make a new world. A world where many worlds fit, where all worlds fit.

*The Global Jigsaw Puzzle* was released in a critical period of the conflict between the EZLN and the government because of the non-fulfillment of the San Andres Agreements, and the massacre of 45 Tzotzil indigenous women and children by state sponsored paramilitary forces in the community of Acteal, occurred on December 27 of 1997 (they were members of Las Abejas (The Bees), a group linked to the Catholic Church). In this context, Marcos' piece on neoliberalism can be seen as political propaganda, a wake-up call to turn attention back to Chiapas. Even if meant only for propaganda purposes, the document is still important for analyzing the global and the historical context in which EZLN is positioning to itself as a political subject confronting the violence of the neoliberal project of the Mexican state.

However, as Marcos discusses later on the same document, his argument on neoliberal globalization as a 'total war' may prove that the jigsaw puzzle is intentionally wrong. As he demonstrates, in neoliberal globalization the financial centers actually have a very clear rationality that the pieces of capital and labor fit on a global scale. Let us examine some of his points. With the end of the 'Third World War' (the Cold War), neoliberalism became the new battleground to reorganize the nation states and to subordinate them to the financial centers. In this 'new world order', the use of state violence is ideologically justified and seen as necessary, rational, fair and legitimate. In such state of things, Marcos continues, neoliberalism utilizes new or renewed ethical, judicial, political, cultural, technological and economic 'weapons' to undermine and destroy the material bases of national sovereignties and economies. It is also in this way

that neoliberalism changes the spatial mobility and the structure of the labor force in radical ways. And in this ‘new market economy’ workers can be more easily detached, reattached, or simply eliminated from the production process, as it is already occurring with the indigenous peoples. Therefore and for all these reasons, neoliberalism is the ‘worst and the cruelest of all the world wars, it is a ‘total war’ against humanity:

The new neoliberal bomb, different from its atomic predecessor in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, did not only destroy the polis (the nation in this case) and imposed death, terror and misery to those who lived in it: or, different from the neutron bomb, did not solely destroy "selectively". The neoliberal bomb, reorganized and reordered what it attacked and remade it as a piece inside a jigsaw puzzle of economic globalization. After its destructive effect, the result is not a pile of smoking ruins, or tens of thousands of inert lives, but a neighborhood attached to one of the commercial megalopolis of the new world supermarket and a labor force re-arranged in the new market of world labor [...]. A war then, a world war, the IV. The worst and cruelest. The one which neoliberalism unleashes in all places and by all means against humanity (*The Seven Loose Pieces*, 1997).

The contrast I have attempted to juxtapose between the state macroeconomic vision of neoliberalism with the Zapatista perspective of it as a war against humanity can be a good starting to explore the EZLN’s reasons for starting an armed rebellion in the name of ‘the dignity’ of the indigenous peoples in Mexico. However, I want to introduce a few more pieces of the neoliberal puzzle before exploring in full the ways in which this rebellion is specifically demanding and acting to affirm and construct a ‘space of dignity’. The proposed order is not imperative here.

## The piece on the childhood

In his argumentation of neoliberal globalization as a total war, Marcos also utilizes statistical sources to illustrate the more than 149 wars that have been launched between the Second and ‘the Third’ World War. The result is 23 million dead and therefore “there is no doubt about the intensity of this Third World War.” The remark is based on *The State of the World’s Children 1996*, a UNICEF’s report released in its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The task of finding this and other of the original sources quoted by Marcos took me a large amount of time, but I made this journey in order to disentangle the pieces of this neoliberal war against humanity on my own.

The UNICEF ‘s annual report was devoted to the impact of warfare on women and children. According to this investigation, in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, war and political upheavals raised the proportion of civilian victims from two thirds in the Second World War to almost 90 per cent by the end of the 1980s. Within the number of civilian victims the number of child victims increased most significantly:

- 2 million killed,
- 4-5 million disabled,
- 12 million left homeless,
- more than 1 million orphaned or separated from their parents, and
- some 10 million psychologically traumatized.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> In the UNICEF’s *Annual Report 1997*, the number of killed children was making up about half of the total world’s war casualties. The same report associated this unprecedented situation partly to the new technological nature of contemporary warfare, and especially of bombardment technology that paradoxically has enlarged ‘the potential battle zones’ to entire national territories and has increased ‘the indiscriminate killings’.

On the other hand, most contemporary conflicts are not between states but are happening inside national territories, between the military and civilians or among groups of armed civilians. According to the same report, in 1994 the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs projected a figure over 20 million as the population 'exposed' to the types of conflicts mentioned above. And coincidentally, UNICEF utilized the language of a 'total war' to describe how the repercussions of the violent social conflicts of today will remain for the decades to come. In *The State of the World's Children 2002*, UNICEF acknowledged the 1990s as a decade of 'undeclared war' on women, adolescents and children. It is characterized as 'undeclared war' because social processes like poverty, conflict, social instability and the impact of preventable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, threatened the human rights and interfere with the people's development. Examples illustrating this situation include: in 2002, 80 per cent out of the 35 million refugees and displaced people in the world were women and children; more than half a billion children lived on less than one dollar a day; and more than 100 million children were out of school because of poverty, discrimination or the lack of resources.

In the 2005, the *World's Children Report* included poverty, conflict, and HIV/AIDS as the greatest 'threats' to children in the coming years. According to the report, more than ten per cent of the population lives on less than one dollar a day. And for Latin American countries the results are even more aggravating if combined poverty with the amounts destined by country to external debt payments. For these countries, the average amount of external debt payments varies from 20 to 49 per cent of the GNP (and in Nicaragua, Honduras, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, the debt payments account from 100 to



200 per cent of the GNP).<sup>49</sup> At the same time, however, the state of poverty in developed countries is comparable.

In some of the richest countries of the world, more than one in every 10 children is raised in families living below the established poverty line. The percentages of children who are likely to live in a poor family are as follows: 26.6 per cent in the Russian Federation; 26.3 in the United States; 21.3 in the United Kingdom and, 21.2 per cent in Italy. Finally, data on HIV/AIDS estimates that over two million children under the age of 15 are already infected with HIV; and 50 per cent of them will die before they reach the age of two.<sup>50</sup> In sum, it is undeniable that children in the world are threatened due to social conflicts, poverty and the pandemic menace of HIV/AIDS. And although further examination shall be required to stake on Marcos' conclusion of a 'total war' against humanity, the negative impact upon basic human rights for children cannot be ignored: "each deprivation exacerbates the effect of the others, and when two or more coincide, the effects on children can be catastrophic" (UNICEF, 2005).

### **The piece on the Millennium Development Goals**

In the foreword of the *World Bank Policy Research Report* (Collier & Dollar, 2001), Nicholas Stern, the former Senior Vice President and Chief Economist pointed out that globalization (broadly defined as the integration of economies and societies around the world) has "helped to reduce poverty in a large number of developing countries" even if

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<sup>49</sup> The stated region's estimated GNI per capita in 2003 was: US\$765 - \$3, 035 in 2003.

<sup>50</sup> The 2005 UNICEF's *Annual Report* also includes summaries by country. Some of the data for Mexico are as follows: near to 43.5 per cent of the population are children under the age of 18. Due to poverty, many children migrate, with or without their families, within rural areas, from rural to urban areas, among urban areas, and to the United States. In 1996, 3.5 million children aged between 12 and 17 were part of the formal or informal labour force. Approximately 24 million Mexicans lived in extreme poverty. And the basic demographics in 2003: total population: 103, 457, 000; GNI per capita: US\$6, 230; Life expectancy at birth: 74 years; Infant mortality rate under age one: 23; Under age five mortality rate: 28.

in the process “too many [developing] countries and people have been left out.” In the same report, Stern explains that this integration in which certain countries are left out is the result of “weak governance and policies, tariffs and other barriers” that limit the access of developing countries to “rich country markets, and declining development assistance”. And the World Bank economist gives a warning regarding the negative effects of trying to reverse the process of globalization:

Some anxieties about globalization are well-founded, but reversing globalization would come at an intolerably high price, destroying the prospects of prosperity for many millions of poor people. We do not agree with those who would retreat into a world of nationalism and protectionism. That way leads to deeper poverty and it is fundamentally hostile to the well being of people in the developing countries. Instead, we must make globalization work for the poor people of the world (Collier & Dollar, 2001).

The World Bank is one of the international organisms taking up the so-called Millennium Development Goals (MDG), some of the most hegemonic agendas on the topic of globalization, governance policies and development. The MDG are in turn the result of ‘The Millennium Declaration’ adopted in September 2000 by the member states of the United Nations, as an international commitment to support a vision of development “that vigorously promotes human development as the key to sustaining social and economic progress in all countries, and recognizes the importance of creating a global partnership for development” (World Bank, 2004). The MDG are nowadays an indicator accepted worldwide to measure development (fig.1). The major development topics promoted by the World Bank are shown below (fig. 2).

**Fig.1 The Millennium Development Goals**

- Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4. Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5. Improve maternal health
- Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development

(Source: <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/GMIS/gdmis.do>)

**Fig. 2 Topics of Development**

Agriculture & rural development	Law & justice
Aids	Macroeconomics & growth
Anticorruption	Millennium development goals
Children & youth	Participation
Debt issues	Policies
Education	Poverty
Energy	Private sector development
Environment	Public sector governance
Financial centers	Social development
Gender	Social protection & labor
Globalization	Sustainable development
Global monitoring	Trade
Health, nutrition & population	Transport
Information, communication & technologies	Urban development
Infrastructure	Water resources management
	Water supply & sanitation

(Source: <http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/thematic.htm>)

## **The piece on the Decade of the Indigenous Peoples**

The UN declared the decade of 1994-2004 as ‘The International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples’. In these years, the World Bank published two important reports: *The Indigenous People and Poverty in Latin America: an empirical analysis* (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 1996), and *The Indigenous Peoples, Poverty and Human Development in Latin America: 1994-2004* (Hall and Patrinos, 2004). Among other relevant questions, the former report recognized that the incidence of poverty in Latin America was high and particularly severe among the indigenous peoples in the region, and it stressed the need for improving the indigenous people’s human capital (primarily education and health outcomes) in an effort to ‘equalize’ the income-generating endowments of the group.<sup>51</sup> The latter focuses the major changes in social conditions in Latin American countries with the largest indigenous populations (Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, and Mexico):

Indigenous Peoples represent 10 percent of the region’s population. Income levels among this group, as well as human development indicators such as education and health conditions, have consistently lagged behind those of the rest of the population. The past ten years have seen a notable increase in attention to the concerns of Indigenous Peoples worldwide. The United Nations proclaimed the opening of the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples on 10 December 1994. And in Latin America, perhaps more than in any other region, the decade was marked by a groundswell of indigenous movements exercising greater and greater political power, from the 1994 Chiapas rebellion to the toppling of governments in Bolivia and Ecuador (Hall & Patrinos, 2004).

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<sup>51</sup> However, it can be said that behind this general argumentation where poverty is identified as the problem, and the development of human capital as the solution, it lays an implicit assessment relating the ‘non-market’ activities of the indigenous peoples as the cause of its inequality and poverty.

However, and in spite of the World Bank's aim of depicting a very optimistic outcome of the indigenous decade worldwide, the bulk of the major findings included by Hall and Patrinos in 2004, can be read also in the opposite direction. As if indirectly admitting the failure of the UN's Decade of the Indigenous peoples the report states that:

- Few gains were made in income poverty reduction among indigenous peoples during the indigenous peoples' decade.
- Indigenous people recover more slowly from economic crises.
- The indigenous poverty gap is deeper, and shrank more slowly over the 1990s.
- Being indigenous increases an individual's probability of being poor and this relationship was about the same at the beginning and at the close of the decade.
- Indigenous people continue to have fewer years of education, but the gap is narrowing. However and education outcomes are substantially worse for indigenous peoples, possibly indicating problems in education quality.
- Indigenous people, especially women and children, continue to have less access to basic health services.<sup>52</sup>

### **The piece on contemporary warfare**

In 1994 the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) pointed out that the world was transitioning towards a 'new international system' resulting from the end of the 'East-West' confrontation. At the time, the report described a connection between this 'new world order' and a developing 'universal security system'. The characteristics of the system resembles some of Marcos' globalization jigsaw puzzle pieces, specially those

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<sup>52</sup> If the former account of the decade is something to be concern about because of the critical life conditions of the indigenous peoples in the region, the assessment made by one of the report's coauthors is not less worrying. The higher rates and the structural poverty of the indigenous population are not unfair but rather they represent 'particularly bad news' for the continent, as it will make it difficult to fulfill the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty by 2015.

concerning the new meanings of sovereignty, and the legitimization of international interventions using the international laws:

Rethinking the values of the international security system means rethinking both the structure and the substance of world politics. There is a need to re-evaluate the meaning of sovereignty, self-determination and non-intervention as part of the basic principles of international law. The new rules should be instrumental in preventing or containing internal conflicts through agreed international action; in rebuffing any attempt to legitimize a concept of special rights or spheres of interests for great powers; and in consolidating and strengthening non-proliferation. To build a new co-operative security regime, including organization of multinational forces to protect all members of the system against any aggression, implies, as a condition *sine qua non*, the right to legitimized intervention. Standing idly by would be tantamount to appeasement and an invitation to break the law (Press Release Highlights, *Year Book 2004*).

In this new world order, war continues to have a key role. According to SIPRI, contemporary conflicts are no longer happening between states as in the past, but they are mainly intra-states wars. In the same report, SIPRI documented 34 major armed conflicts in 1993; all of them were classified as intra-state conflicts (Major armed conflicts, 2004). In 2003, 19 major armed conflicts were reported worldwide; most of these conflicts occurred in Africa and Asia, and they were also classified as intra-state wars. In the same year military expenses reached US\$956 billions:

High-income countries account for about 75 per cent of world military spending but only 16 per cent of world population. The combined military spending of these countries was slightly higher than the aggregate foreign debt of all low-income countries and 10 times higher than their combined levels of official development assistance in 2001 (Military expenditure, *Year Book 2004*).

In 2005 military expenses went over US\$1 trillion, this amount corresponded to a global average of US\$162 per capita and 2.6 per cent of the world GDP (Military expenditure, *Year Book 2005*).<sup>53</sup> In the same year, the topics of concern were related to ‘global’ war issues such as technology-intensive war, the global war on terrorism, so-called post-cold war regionalism, and global security governance. Finally, for the first time the theme of ‘security’ was introduced as a criterion of sustainable development (Press Release, *Year Book 2005*).

I am finishing here my personal account of neoliberal globalization, and as with Marcos’ jigsaw puzzle, I am doing so with a piece about contemporary war. Like Marcos, I am similarly convinced too that there are ever more pieces and possibilities to get an accurate picture of the world. Nevertheless, the similarities I found between the various perspectives on the violent nature and the unevenness associated with the neoliberal world order cannot be a conclusion but rather a historical context to put in perspective the EZLN’s particular demand to construct a ‘space of dignity’ for the indigenous peoples and for all human beings in the world.

### **The tale of the star, the hand and the badger**

The *Ponencia a 7voces 7*, a tale written and read by Subcomandante Marcos in La Realidad during the Intercontinental Encounter against Neoliberalism, includes a story that occurred sometime in the 1980s as Marcos leaves Mexico City to go to the Lacandona jungle and enlist himself in the EZLN Army. Marcos narrates a dialogue

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<sup>53</sup> For that year, the report indicated that nearly 50 per cent of the global military expenditures amount corresponded to the U.S., partly as a result of changes on its military doctrine and strategy after September 9/11 2001.

between himself and el Viejo Antonio, the wise old Maya indigenous that accompanied and counseled him for a long time. On a rainy night, Marcos and el Viejo Antonio went out to the jungle to hunt a badger that was stealing the maize from el Viejo Antonio's *milpa* (plot). While they are waiting to catch the badger, el Viejo Antonio extends his hand towards a star in the sky. Marcos looks to the star and anticipating the question of the indigenous old man, he responds to him, —I was recalling a proverb that says something like this: “When the finger indicates the sun, the idiot one looks to the finger.” Laughing at this, el Viejo Antonio replied to Marcos, —He would be even more idiot if he looked at the sun. He could get blind. And after lighting a cigarette, el Viejo Antonio explains his overwhelming logic:

—A short while ago my hand was not pointing out the star. I was thinking about how much I would need to walk so that my hand could touch the star above in the sky. I was going to ask you to calculate the distance between my hand and the star, but you came along with an explanation about the finger and the sun. I was showing you neither my hand nor the star.  
That idiot of whom your proverb speaks has no intelligent alternative: if he looks at the sun and does not get blind, he will stumble along his path as he continues to look upwards; if he looks at the finger then he will never find his own way but rather remain standing or walking behind the finger.  
In the end both men are idiots: the one who is looking at the sun and the one who is looking at the finger ( p.238).

Next, Marcos asked to the old man one last question before finishing the story:

—How can we learn to look far and close? El Viejo Antonio answers:

—Speaking and listening. Speaking and listening to those who are near; and speaking and listening to those who are afar. El Viejo Antonio returns to point the hand towards the star. He looks to his hand and continues: —When dreaming it is necessary to see the star there above, but when fighting it is necessary to see the hand that is indicating the star. That is life. Life is to look up and then lower your glance all the time (p.240).



Like in other narratives where Marcos and el Viejo Antonio are the protagonists, the end of this tale can also be a possibility of starting over. In the story, Marcos eventually confesses to the old man that he was looking not at his hand nor at the star and even less, at the space between one and the other. —So, what you were looking at? Asked El Viejo Antonio. Marcos runs away and shouts he was looking at a badger wandered between the old man's hand and the star! In a similar fashion, the powerful metaphor of learning to look far and close can be a rather effective approach to thinking about the Zapatista rebellion. Moreover this metaphor could a prompt to begin to question who is looking far and who is looking close in the globalization jigsaw puzzle. Nevertheless, I want to suggest and concentrate on a third possibility, that of figuring out where is the badger that is stealing the maize while we are looking to the fingers and the stars! And so, in light of the symbolic tension between 'dreaming' and 'fighting', it will be necessary to outline the different conceptual and practical levels addressed by the Zapatista struggle.

### **The fire and the word**

In 2003 the EZLN coined the slogan of '20 y 10, el fuego y la palabra' (20 and 10, the fire and the word), to organize a national 'celebration' of the first decade of the Zapatista rebellion. The first number corresponds to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the EZLN in the Lacandona jungle (on November 17, 1983); the second number makes reference to the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the armed uprising started on in the very last hours of December 31 of 1993. Respectively, in the slogan, 'the fire' constitutes a symbolic reference to the armed phase of the rebellion, which includes the decade of clandestine

political and military preparation in the 1980s, and the first ten years since the EZLN seized San Cristóbal and declared the war with the Mexican government. Lastly, ‘the word’, constitutes a symbol of the current phase of peaceful political resistance and dialogue with the civil societies (and considerably) less with the Mexican government, intended to reach a definitive political solution to their eleven original demands: work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the early shift of EZLN from armed confrontation to civil and peaceful resistance has been considered a main feature that characterizes –and differentiates– this rebellion from other contemporary struggles in Mexico and Latin America. However, the tension between ‘the fire’ and ‘the word’ is at the same time shading a light on the nature of the relationship between the neoliberal state in Mexico and the indigenous peoples, and on the unprecedented development of indigenous peoples as autonomous political subjects that are demanding to the state to obtain a ‘space of dignity’, both in a material and symbolic dimensions.

The development and the impact of these processes can be followed frame-by-frame throughout the five Declarations of the Lacandona Jungle (which are analyzed in the next chapter). Nevertheless, it is important to advance some ideas that are connecting the EZLN’s declarations of principles and goals to the production of space. First, the DSLs are indicative of how the political development of EZLN has been an intensive up-scaling process growing out from a local and a national struggle for the ‘dignity’ of the indigenous peoples into -global scale resistance against neoliberalism. And second, the DSLs are giving account on how this political and spatial development was first, a result,

and later a condition for the national positioning of civil society as a political subject. In addition, the DSLs illustrate a very important phase of the dialogue between the Zapatistas and the government, a phase in which a strong nation-wide alliance between the EZLN and the civil societies pushed the government to eventually recognize the legitimacy of the Zapatista struggle, and later to sign the San Andres Agreements (among other things, the agreements opened the possibility for a constitutional recognition of a distinct spatial order, and more specifically for 'regional' order based on the practice of indigenous autonomy). Finally, it is also in this phase that the EZLN's demand to obtain autonomy began to be specifically framed as a demand of 'dignity'. Dignity became to be 'the only means' to 'incorporate' indigenous peoples with justice into the nation.

### **The 'breaking' of the blockade**

The building of the Zapatista indigenous autonomy in Chiapas has involved an intensive metamorphosis of space, and very much a conscious political use of its symbolic and material dimensions. With the early rejection of all government economic and social support by the Zapatista communities in the Highlands and the Lacandona regions; then with the 'breaking' of the military blockade; and with the eventual declaration of the Zapatista Autonomous Rebel Municipalities in over a third part of the state municipalities. The episode of the 'breaking' was for the Zapatista struggle a key moment in the unveiling of the spatial politics laying behind the struggle for the recognition of the indigenous peoples' rights. First of all, it revealed the bold confrontation not only for the control of the material space but for its symbolic (political) representation, as it can be

observed in the following response given by Marcos to inform then president Ernesto Zedillo about the breaking:

It is my duty to communicate that you have an indigenous rebellion in the Southeast of the Nation. [ . . . ] I believe that it is useless to warn you that your belief of a conflict “limited to four municipalities” is useless, and that peace agreements were completed throughout the whole state of Chiapas except in the conflict zone, is incorrect. They deceived you Mister Zedillo, they have always deceived you (*Documentos y Comunicados* 2, p.183).

Second of all, the ‘breaking’ constitutes the first stage of a coordinated process of organizing different political and territorial structures (including MAREZ, Caracoles, and Good Government Juntas) as spaces and scales to build up the Zapatista peaceful and civil resistance. On a regional level, the existence of these spaces constitute a practical way of breaking down the state’s dominant military and paramilitary logic to regain absolute control over the people, the land and the natural resources in the territories controlled by the EZLN in the Highlands and the Lacandona Jungle. And the EZLN has used these spaces as a means to scale up resistance to neoliberal globalization. And lastly, ‘the breaking’ contributed to shade light on other processes of reorganizing local power at the time, included the so-called ‘Rebel Government of Transition’, an alternate state government appointed by social organizations and headed by local journalist Amado Avendaño.

### **The path of the caracol**

In a ceremony celebrated on November 17 of 1994, the EZLN’s CCRI conferred the *bastón de mando* (the wood stick of command) to Subcomandante Marcos, and named

him as the EZLN's chief military leader. By giving him this symbol, the Zapatistas symbolically gathered all the civil and the military decisions and 'deposit them' in a single military command. The *bastón de mando*, as Comandante Tacho and Mayor Moisés of the EZLN explain it, symbolizes 'the culture and the will of the indigenous peoples', in other words, it represents the power and the will of the community (*Transición*, p.27). However, the *bastón de mando* was not the only important symbol in the ceremony, that day 'thousands of insurgents and militias' of the EZLN formed the figure of a *caracol*, a figure that looked like a snail shell:

This meant that the *compañeros* came from different parts of the country to enter into the jungle. As they entered, they will then return to their cities again. That's the meaning of the *caracol*; it sometimes enters to the bottom and others times it turns back to the outside (p.27).

In the indigenous tradition, this ritual is called the ceremony of 'the Seven Gods'; seven gods, seven roads, and seven forces. The seven forces, Tacho and Moisés continue, are the Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Chol, Mame, Zoque indigenous, and the *mestizos*. And the force of these seven forces together is what provides 'the force to the *bastón de mando* of the true men and women'. Today the seven forces are symbolized with seven words: the weapons, the blood, the bullet, the maize, the land, the national flag, and the flag of the EZLN:

The figure of a human being rests inside this five-point star: a head, two hands, two feet, and a red heart that binds the five parts as one. We are human beings, and this means we have dignity. This is the flag of dignity. Remember that our struggle is always for the human being (*Documentos y Comunicados 2*, p.139).

In the light of the long-term struggle of the EZLN, the ceremony of the Seven Gods placed in context a crucial historical event: the preparation of the military offensive that gave birth to the MAREZ and to the Rebel Territory. Plus the ceremony puts in context the importance and the meaning of key symbols that the EZLN has used to represent and carry out their struggle. Among them, the symbols embodying specific notions of space and dignity, like the national flag (representing the nation), the flag of EZLN (symbolizing the struggle for human dignity), and the figure of the caracol. At the time, the caracol was one of the most undecipherable symbols, but nowadays the figure symbolizes a sense of totality, of movement and of direction in the Zapatistas struggle.

Back then, as Tacho and Moisés explained, Chiapas was divided as a result of the war and of the blockade upon the EZLN. Even so, the Zapatista struggle began to grow and gained force taken from the principles that they were fighting for: “It is a struggle for dignity because it is a fight for all what is needed to live with dignity: land, work, housing, education, health, food, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace” (*Documentos y Comunicados* 2, p. 31). In 2003, with the inauguration of the Good Government, it can be argued that the Zapatista caracol turned its trajectory back into ‘the bottom’ of its own shell to ensure the indigenous government will ‘command by obeying’, and that it will govern for the indigenous communities can have what is needed to live with dignity.

## CHAPTER FOUR POST-INTERGALACTIC CHRONICLES?

PUEBLO DE MÉXICO: Nosotros, hombres y mujeres íntegros y libres, estamos conscientes de que la guerra que declaramos es una medida última pero justa. Los dictadores están aplicando una guerra genocida no declarada contra nuestros pueblos desde hace muchos años, por lo que pedimos tu participación decidida apoyando este plan del pueblo mexicano que lucha por trabajo, tierra, techo, alimentación, salud, educación, independencia, libertad, democracia, justicia y paz. Declaramos que no dejaremos de pelear hasta lograr el cumplimiento de estas demandas básicas de nuestro pueblo formando un gobierno de nuestro país libre y democrático. **INTÉGRATE A LA FUERZAS INSURGENTES DEL EJÉRCITO ZAPATISTA DE LIBERACIÓN NACIONAL \_EZLN.** *Declaración de la Selva Lacandona*, 1994).<sup>54</sup>

### **The Declarations of the Lacandona Jungle**

The Declarations of the Lacandona Jungle written and released between 1993 and 1998 are the core of the EZLN's principles, demands, strategies and means for struggle. The first DSL, read in San Cristóbal de las Casas on January 1, 1994, is a declaration of war to the Mexican federal army and the government lead by president Carlos Salinas de

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<sup>54</sup> "To the People of Mexico: We, the men and women, full and free, are conscious that the war that we have declared is our last resort, but also a just one. The dictators are applying an undeclared genocidal war against our people for many years. Therefore we ask for your participation, your decision to support this plan that struggles for work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace. We declare that we will not stop fighting until the basic demands of our people have been met by forming a government of our country that is free and democratic. **JOIN THE INSURGENT FORCES OF THE ZAPATISTA ARMY OF NATIONAL LIBERATION.**" English translation taken from [www.ezln.org/documentos/1994/199312xx.es.htm](http://www.ezln.org/documentos/1994/199312xx.es.htm)

Gortari (1988-1994). Even today, the earliest statement ‘Ya Basta!’ (Enough is Enough) quoted in this first declaration, continues to be the best-known symbol of the Zapatista struggle across the world. A close examination of the themes and reasons of each declaration provides an invaluable written memory of the EZLN’s political development and practice, and a means to explore what notions of space and dignity have been brought by the Zapatistas into the struggle throughout the years.

In the second DSL, dated June 10, 1994, the EZLN implicitly recognized the impossibility of defeating the federal troops in a long-term military contest, but certainly the most relevant acknowledgement the Zapatistas made here was their decision to move away from armed confrontation and to look instead for a political but not less radical strategy: to call upon civil society to join the indigenous rebels in the task of ‘peacefully’ conducting the nation through a ‘democratic transition’.<sup>55</sup> This transition is understood in the specific sense of organizing civil society to fight with the EZLN for the reconstruction of the political and social pact held by the Mexican Constitution. This strategic shift from armed war to political resistance, is briefed in the EZLN’s call to organize the National Democratic Convention in the Aguascalientes of Guadalupe Tepeyac, in the Lacandona Jungle. The CND, held on August 8 and 9 of 1994, and attended by more than 6, 000 peoples from all over the country, was the first and the earliest action whereby the Zapatistas proposed to install a transitional government and so to modify the Constitution and the national law in order to demand the state to respect the people’s right to sovereignty (stated in Art.39 as the right to alter and modify the form of

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<sup>55</sup> In different documents the EZLN repeatedly made reference to the concept of ‘civil society’ in a extended sense addressing distinct political subjects who are located ‘out’ of the partisan and government realms, e.g. the workers in the countryside and cities, neighbors and residents, teachers and students, women and young people, artists and intellectuals, religious members, the community based militants of the different political organizations.



government at any time). Also since this early stage, the EZLN made explicit its positioning not as a political vanguard but only as a subject looking to agree in an idea for transforming the country with other political forces:

The pain of this process will be less than the damage produced by a civil war. The prophecy of the Southeast is valid for the whole country; we can learn now from what has happened and make the birth of the new Mexico less painful. The EZLN has an idea of what system and direction the country should have. But the political maturity of the EZLN, its coming of age as a representative part of the Nation's sensibilities, depends on the fact that it doesn't want to impose its idea on the country (*second Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle*).

The contents included in the third DSL, released on the first anniversary of the uprising on January 1, 1995, conveyed a significant interest in the 'limits and possibilities' of electoral and partisan struggle as a means to achieve a democratic transformation. At the time, the portrayed defeat of these legal (institutional) resources by the 'gigantic' electoral fraud launched by the 'dictatorial one-party-state system' in the presidential elections of August 21, 1994, along with the previous attempt of the Mexican government of portraying the conflict in Chiapas as a local concern, led to a polarization of the national and the local political situation.<sup>56</sup> The Declaration also documents the EZLN's answer to the government attempt to decrease the support and the legitimacy of the Zapatista indigenous struggle by means of denouncing the impossibility of resolving the indigenous concerns without making radical changes in the political, economic, and social relations throughout the country. And thus the EZLN demanded 'the re-orientation' of the national economic program.

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<sup>56</sup> The third Declaration also includes a summary of the electoral aftermath and the work of the several organizations, like Alianza Cívica, the CND, and the so-called Comisión de la Verdad (Commission for Truth), in documenting and denouncing the electoral fraud.

The EZLN continued an intensive work to integrate a nation-wide opposition front with civil society. This front was called National Liberation Movement (MLN), and it was key to push for a 'national transitional government for democracy' under detailed bases that included: the disappearance of the system of the party-state, and the recognition of the indigenous peoples' right to autonomy and citizenship.<sup>57</sup> The MLN was the EZLN's second major request to civil society for political mobilization.

The fourth DSL, released on January 1 of 1996, is one of the most compelling appeals made to the Mexican people's historical memory. It is a call to support the war of the indigenous peoples 'against oblivion'. The fourth is as rich as complex because of the highly political and symbolic accounting of the ancient history of exploitation of the indigenous peoples in Mexico, a history referred by the EZLN as 'the long night of the 500 years':

Housing, land, employment, food, education, independence, democracy, liberty, justice and peace. These were our banners during the dawn of 1994. These were our demands during that long night of 500 years. These are, today, our necessities. Our blood and our word have light a small fire in the mountain and we walk a path against the house of money and the powerful. Brothers and sisters of other races and languages, of other colors, but with the same heart now protect our light and in it they drink of the same fire. The powerful came to extinguish us with its violent wind, but our light grew in other lights. The rich dream still about extinguishing the first light. It is useless, there are now too many lights and they have all become the first.

In the same declaration the EZLN analyses the difficulties in the dialogue with the Mexican authorities in the first three years of the conflict, and detailed the political situation prevailing before the sign of the San Andres Agreements (ASA) in February of

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<sup>57</sup> The other bases included: the separation of the government from the PRI; the reform of the electoral law; the convening of a constitutional body for the creation of a new constitution, and the re-orientation of the national economic program.

1996. In one of the strongest statements ever made by the EZLN against the government, the rebels summed up the significance of having compromised the government to dialogue and to recognize the indigenous peoples as full members of the nation's political community:

The indigenous Mexicans, the ones always forced to listen, to obey, to accept, to resign themselves, took the word and spoke the wisdom which is in their walk. The image of the ignorant Indian, pusillanimous and ridiculous, the image which the Powerful had decreed for national consumption, was shattered, and the indigenous pride and dignity returned to history in order to take the place it deserves: that of complete and capable citizens (*fourth Declaration of the Lacandona*).

In the same document the EZLN requested an intercontinental dialogue, which was to be the Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism.<sup>58</sup> They also called on people to join the Zapatista Front of National Liberation (FZLN), 'a civil and nonviolent organization' to struggle for democracy, liberty, and justice in Mexico. This was the fifth call to keep people active in supporting the EZLN's peaceful political resistance:

We extend an invitation to participate in it to the factory workers of the Republic, to the laborers of the countryside and of the cities, to the indigenous peoples, to the colonos, to teachers and students, to the Mexican women, to young people across the country, to the honest artists and intellectuals, to responsible priests and nuns, and to all the Mexican people who do not seek power, but rather democracy, liberty, and justice for ourselves and for our children. We invite national civic society, those without a party, the citizen and social movement, all Mexicans to construct this new political force. A new political force which will be national. A new political force based in the EZLN (Ibid).

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<sup>58</sup> The Encounter took place in August of 1996. I will analyze this event later in the chapter.

On December 22, 1997 government-sponsored paramilitary groups slaughtered 45 indigenous members of Las Abejas who lived in the community of Acteal, in Chenalhó, Chiapas. After it condemning the massacre, the EZLN withdrew from the dialogue with the government representatives and remained out of the political scene until July 19, 1998, when they released the fifth DSL. In this Declaration the EZLN acknowledged the vital role of civil society in building up solidarity networks in support of the Zapatista struggle, and they demanded to the government the fulfillment of the ASA. With this purpose the EZLN asked for a National Consultation for Peace, to demonstrate support for the so-called 'Legal Initiative on Indigenous Rights', prepared by the Commission of Concordance and Peace (COCOPA) to transform the ASA into a law initiative.<sup>59</sup> The consultation was carried out on March 21, 1999.<sup>60</sup>

In March 2001, the so-called 'March of the Indigenous Dignity', best known as 'The Zapa Tour', arrived to Mexico City lead by twenty-three Zapatista commanders and after having visited several states, Chiapas included. The commanders spoke before the Congress to ask the government of Vicente Fox (2000-2006) to fulfill the COCOPA's legal initiative. In April 2001, that is a month after the Zapatistas spoke before the Congress, an 'Indigenous Bill' was approved by the House of Representatives and went into force after a complicated and unequal process of confirmation by the local state Congresses. The EZLN rejected the Indigenous Bill because the contents and compromises were radically different to those agreed upon with EZLN in 1996, the bill basically denied the right to territory for the indigenous communities, and did not

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<sup>59</sup> The COCOPA was a legislative commission designated by the federal government in 1996.

<sup>60</sup> It also included other questions concerning the public opinion about the EZLN's demand for a definitive end of the state war against the indigenous in Chiapas and, the EZLN's condemnation of the absence of political mediation to resolve the conflict.

recognize the indigenous peoples as political entities with government capabilities. The Zapatistas withdrew from dialogue with all government representatives ever since.

### **Everything for all, nothing to us**

In the Declarations of the Lacandona the concepts of sovereignty, democracy and dignity are political and symbolically connected to assert the EZLN's indigenous identity before the state. In an overall perspective, sovereignty is recovered as the most valuable of the people's rights, as it is stated in the national Constitution (Art.39), sovereignty:

“essentially and originally resides in the people. All political power emanates from the people and its purpose is to help the people. The people have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government (*Constitución Política*, p.52). Hence, democracy is essentially referred as the agreed system ruling the (legal) authority of government under the basis of respect the (legitimate) people's power to freely decide or modify the form of government. And lastly, the meaning of dignity is closely derived from the value of citizenship as the capacity of the people to exercise their right to demand the government to respect democracy and people's sovereignty.

The idea of fully exercising basic political rights is in fact critical for the sense of revolution pursued by the EZLN. This revolution is not proposing to create a new world “ but rather a much earlier stage: the entryway to the new Mexico. In this sense, this revolution will not end with a new class, faction of class or group in power, it will end in a free and democratic space for political struggle” (*second Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle*). However, the resulting EZLN's standing on do not taking state power (in turn identified with their other celebrated statement of ‘Para todos todo, nada para nosotros’

(Everything for all, nothing for us), deserves careful attention since, as I mentioned before, it has been identified with the essential revolutionary nature of the EZLN rebellion.

A second reading of this affirmation, based on what is stated in the DSLs, unveils an important complementary idea, one in which state power is envisioned not as an end by itself but only as a means for political and social change. The fundamental matter, say the Zapatistas in the second Declaration, is not about ‘who’ is in power but rather ‘how’ power should be exerted:

In this new framework, the problem of power will not be question of who the incumbent is, but rather of who exercises the power. If the majority of the people exercise the power, political parties will see themselves as obliged to confront the majority instead of each other.

Plus, the ‘Everything for all, nothing for us’ is embodying a moral affirmation of power as a relationship between political subjects: the government and the people, the government and the civil society. For the Zapatistas, power is not about a *per se* exercise of political power, but power must be constructed through the permanent confrontation between the authority of those who are in government, and the legitimacy they have before the people, the political organizations or the social classes (*second Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle*). From this perspective, the revolutionary transformation proposed by the EZLN embraces the political and moral unity of the government, the citizens, the Constitution, and the political institutions. Besides, in the DSLs the Zapatistas clearly stated that this transformation cannot be the single result of the EZLN or of anyone else’s political project: “This project must still be created and it will correspond, not to a homogeneous political force or to the geniality of an individual, but to a broad opposition

movement capable of gathering the sentiments of the nation” (*fourth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle*).

In February of 1995 the Mexican army launched a second major military offensive against the EZLN, this time with the purpose of chasing and capturing the EZLN leadership.<sup>61</sup> A few months later the Zapatista Army called for the Plebiscite for Peace and Democracy. The plebiscite was held in August and September of 1995 with more than 1, 300, 000 people participating in Mexico and outside the country. The significance of this experience of dialogue arises not merely from the fact that “never before in the history of the world or the nation had a peaceful civil society dialogued with a clandestine and armed group” (*second Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle*), but because the EZLN showed the strength of the national and international civil support for the indigenous demands.

The EZLN used the Plebiscite to extend its political support, and later on to strengthen the capacity of the group to state their demands to the Mexican government during the discussions and the sign of the ASA in 1996. The agreements, as it was stated in fifth DSL, represented the major EZLN political achievement at the time. They were the means to place the indigenous question within the national agenda for the first time in the nation’s history:

A constitutional reform in matters of indigenous rights and culture should not be unilateral, it should incorporate the San Andres Accords and in that way recognize the fundamental nature of the Indian people's demands: autonomy, territoriality, Indian peoples, normative regulations. In the Accords, the right to indigenous autonomy and territory is recognized, in accordance with Convention 169 of the ILO, signed by the Senate of the Republic. No legislation which tries to shrink the Indian peoples by limiting their rights to the community level, thus promoting

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<sup>61</sup> The episode is addressed in the next chapter.

their fragmentation and their dispersal which will make their annihilation possible, can ensure peace and the inclusion in the Nation of the very first Mexicans. Any reform which tries to break the bonds of historical and cultural solidarity which exist among the indigenous peoples, is condemned to failure and is, simply, an injustice and an historical denial.

### **Opening spaces for political struggle**

The importance of the Declarations can be addressed as well in terms of its contribution to creating a representational space around ideas of freedom, democracy, sovereignty or justice that was crucial in giving to the EZLN's demand for a 'space of dignity' a more specific political meaning. For example, in the third DSL, the EZLN introduced the demand of autonomy as means to 'incorporate' the indigenous peoples with 'justice and dignity' into the nation. In this statement, autonomy is seen both as a political and a spatial means to obtain a solution to their fundamental demands:

The indigenous question will not have a solution if there is not a RADICAL transformation of the national pact. The only means of incorporating, with justice and dignity the indigenous of the Nation, is to recognize the characteristics of their own social, political and cultural organization. Autonomy is not separation; it is integration of the most humble and forgotten minorities of contemporary Mexico (*Third DSL*, 1995).

Or in 1996, when the Zapatistas made explicit their commitment to opening a 'free space' for the dialogue and the encounter with civil society. This space was the Zapatista Front of National Liberation. The FZLN (integrated by 200 civil committees throughout the country) was represented as: "A space for citizen political action where there may be a confluence with other political forces of the independent opposition, a space where popular wills may encounter and coordinate united actions with one another" (Ibid). As I have shown, the FZLN was neither the first nor the last of the EZLN efforts to think on



the possibility of creating political spaces by means of peaceful resistance, and of using them as means for national mobilization and to construct consensus among the civil society about the EZLN's goals and strategies used to achieve their objectives.

In a similar fashion, the DLJs convey several different but paired symbolic meanings of dignity. These ideas are more or less associated, on the one hand, with representations of identity, community, history and memory, as in the notion of the indigenous 'dignified resistance':

While the government baited with corrupt wealth and imposed hunger in order to force surrender and to conquer, the Zapatistas made our hunger into food, and our poverty into the wealth of dignity that we deserved and were entitled to. Silence, dignity and resistance were our strengths and our best weapons. With them, we fought and defeated an enemy who is powerful, but whose cause lacks reason and justice. From our experience and from the long and shining history of indigenous struggle which we inherited from our ancestors, the first inhabitants of these lands, we picked up these weapons again and converted our silences into soldiers, our dignity into light, and our walls into resistance (*fifth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle*).

And on the other hand, with references to class and power as in the mention to a 'dignified peace'. Here dignity is utilized as another form to demand the government to respect the people's most fundamental rights (sovereignty, democracy, and citizenship), as the only political basis to achieve the ending of the war against the indigenous peoples in Chiapas, and therefore, as the means to create the new relationships that "will be born on the grave of *presidencialismo* and the putrid cadaver of the State party system" (*second Declaration of the Lacandona*) at all levels of government (national, regional and local). On this specific matter, Adolfo Gilly (1997) has argued that in fact the EZLN is constructing its own (cultural) representations of universal notions of democracy, justice, sovereignty and dignity, and the best example of this is the tension between the right to

be *equals* (which involves an idea of equality within the major ‘collective identity’ represented by the Republic and by the ‘Republican equality’), and the right to be *different* (that is an idea of existing and been recognized within the ‘plurality’ of the collective identities integrating the Republican Equality). Thus, Gilly concludes that the EZLN’s demand of dignity might be understood not only in reference to its moral contents (as the right of any individual to be recognized as a human being), but also as a claim ‘to belong’, to be a part of a political community, such as the nation. The Zapatista battle for ‘belonging’ is therefore an ultimate fighting for citizenship.

However, even thinking the Zapatista political project this way, the question of how a ‘space of dignity’ could be produced by re-asserting the very same sources of social and spatial contradictions at the scale of the nation-state, remains as central. In this regard, a likely means to focus this concern comes from the positioning of the EZLN’s envisioned ‘transition to democracy’ as a ‘reconstruction project’ for the nation and to confront the state neoliberal policies:

On the one hand, the national project of the Powerful, a project which entails the total destruction of the Mexican nation; the negation of its history; the sale of its sovereignty; treachery and crime as supreme values; hypocrisy and deceit as a method of government; destabilization and insecurity as a national program; repression and intolerance as a plan for economic development. This project finds in the PRI its criminal face and in the PAN its pretense of democracy.

On the other hand, the project of a transition to democracy, not a transition within a corrupt system which simulates change in order for everything to remain the same, but the transition to democracy as a reconstruction project for the nation; the defense of national sovereignty; justice and hope as aspirations; truth and government through obedience as a guide for leadership; the stability and security given by democracy and liberty; dialogue, tolerance and inclusion as a new way of making politics. This project must still be created and it will correspond, not to a homogeneous political force or to the geniality of an individual, but to a broad opposition movement capable of gathering the sentiments of the nation.

Yet, and nonetheless the symbolic power of the EZLN's call to 'reconstruct' the nation, under the present circumstances the project of a transition to democracy poses important limits to the practical possibilities of engaging a revolutionary transformation, a fact actually recognized by the Zapatistas since very earliest stages: "those projects which belong to the new opposition lack something which today has become decisive. We are opposed to a national project which implies its destruction, but we lack a proposal for a new Nation, a proposal for reconstruction" (Ibid). In this light, it is hence important to briefly consider the process of building the major political alliance the EZLN has so far used in order to engage this major social and political transformation: the alliance with civil society.

### **Building political alliances**

The Zapatistas have always insisted that the indigenous peoples will not be the vanguard or the leadership, but only a part of a broad civil opposition movement "capable of gathering the sentiments of the nation" (*fourth Declaration of the Lacandona*). In the fourth DSL, they made explicit the need of working with the civil society to build a strong opposition to lead the transition of the nation to democracy. However, it is worthy of noticed that after all these years the alliance between the EZLN and the civil society has turned to be as taken for granted, even though in 1994 the possibility of imagining a relationship between an armed and clandestine movement, and a political society characterized at the time for its immobility and lethargy, was by and large hard to imagine.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See Carlos Monsiváis, *Entrada libre* (Mexico: 1987).

In the next pages I want to explore the origins of this relationship as it is accounted in the DSLs, by focusing two events occurred in 1996: the organization of the FZLN, and the Intercontinental Encounter. On the one hand, these two events occurred in a moment when the EZLN had declared its skepticism about the role of political parties, and also after they recognized the limits of other oppositional movements and electoral means to achieve the democracy they wanted for the country. And on the other hand, 1996 has been pointed out by the EZLN as the beginning of a ‘new stage’ in the Zapatista struggle, a phase of a coordinated action between the ‘civil’ and the ‘armed’ Zapatistas.

In this context, it is interesting to again noticing the strong class self-positioning of the EZLN within the structures of the nation-state, as well as the use of this positioning to build a dialogue with other political subjects, the civil society included. Here are some examples that can be found in the Declarations. The Zapatista Army, they say, is the result of 500 years of struggle against ‘the exploitation’ of the indigenous people in Mexico. The EZLN is a belligerent army of indigenous insurgent fighters launching a ‘national struggle for liberation’. The indigenous peoples are the first inhabitants of Mexico, ‘the inheritors and true builders’ of the nation, and they are the ones who work the land, the people who have dark faces and speak the *palabra verdadera* (‘true’ language).<sup>63</sup> And the EZLN describes the civil society as an ‘organized hope’ and then a force superior to any political or military power: “The flag is now in the hands of those who have name and face, of good and honest people who travel by routes that are not ours, but whose goal is the same one we yearn for” (*second Declaration of the*

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<sup>63</sup> In the DSLs the word ‘palabra verdadera’ has been translated into English as ‘indigenous language’ instead of ‘true language’. The difference is important because the notion of the ‘palabra verdadera’ is not only about speaking the indigenous languages, but it involves a complex cosmological conception of indigenous peoples and indigenous identity, and this conception has been incorporated very on purpose thorough the EZLN’s political ideas.

*Lacandona*).<sup>64</sup> Here the explicit reference to the people's 'names' and 'faces' is equally important because of the government's attempts to question the legitimacy of the Zapatista struggle since the indigenous are hiding their faces behind the *pasamontañas* (ski mask).<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, the former representations cannot illuminate entirely the reasons why the EZLN assigned such a key role to civil society in leading the transition of the nation to democracy, or address the question if civil society accepted or was prepared enough to assume that responsibility. In fact, as it can be followed next, the DSLs indicate that the initial meeting between the EZLN and the civil society was more a reaction to political circumstances rather than the result of a clear political consciousness.

On the one hand, as described in the introductory chapter, in the first days of 1994, the citizens took the streets of Mexico City to demand the government to end the military actions against the EZLN in Chiapas, and to call both sides to political dialogue. Nevertheless, even today the nature of this early maneuver seems like a contradiction, since as Rovira (1994) rightly noticed, the civil society condemned the government for using armed violence against the indigenous rebels, but it justified the decision of the indigenous to start an armed war as a legitimate means for social transformation. On the other hand, in some interviews Subcomandante Marcos recognized that this earlier encounter with the civil society took the Zapatistas by surprise, a fact that certainly speaks of the uncertainty at the time, but it also demonstrates an even bigger capacity of tactical improvisation on the side of the EZLN. Eventually, the EZLN recognized the

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<sup>64</sup> However, at times the lack of a conceptual unity would be a problem in reading the EZLN documents, especially regarding the concepts of state, government, and civil society.

<sup>65</sup> Subcomandante Marcos was right when he pointed out how sarcastic resulted this situation in which suddenly -but finally- the Mexican government showed a great interest for knowing the faces of the indigenous people, for the first time in 500 years of national history!

‘command’ of civil society to leave the armed confrontation and look for means of political and peaceful resistance. The EZLN recognized the CND as the “authentic representation of the interests of the Mexican people in its transition to democracy” (*second Declaration of the Lacandona*), and so it became the first national coordinated action between the civil society and a clandestine armed movement in Mexico’s contemporary history. The possibility of peaceful democratic change became an alternative to war.

In the years that followed the CND, several pieces were gathered together to keep nourishing this nascent proximity between the civil society and the rebels in Chiapas. Nevertheless, it was until 1996 that the possibility of an alliance between the EZLN and the civil society started to work out as a result of a conscious political practice. The political momentum was decisive for the years to come for several reasons. As already shown, it was vital to strength the support to the San Andres Agreements; it was important for the territorialization of the EZLN’s political resistance across symbolic and material space; it was critical to reinforce the class nature of the conflict and to identify potential alliances with other popular movements in the country. But the moment was equally important since the EZLN was among the few political forces who foreseen then the rise of the PAN and the ‘neoPANismo’ –presently in power- as a lengthening of the state neoliberal project in Mexico:

The National Action Party [PAN], the most faithful ally of Salinas de Gortari, began to demonstrate its real possibilities of replacing the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in the summit of political power and demonstrate its repressive, intolerant and reactionary nature. Those who see hope in the rise of neo-PANism forget that a substitution in a dictatorship is not democracy. They applaud the new inquisition, which through a democratic facade, pretends to

sanction with moralistic blows the last remains of a country which was once a world wonder and today provides the material for chronicles of police action and scandals (*fourth Declaration of the Lacandona*).

This time the historical moment did not take the Zapatistas by surprise as in 1994, but on the contrary, they were prepared enough to take advantage of the political circumstances and especially of the positive correlation of forces generated since the Plebiscite for Peace and Democracy in 1995. The EZLN launched three major 'initiatives' of national and international magnitude:

An initiative for the international arena expresses itself in a call to carry out an intercontinental dialogue in opposition to neoliberalism. The two other initiatives are of a national character: the formation of civic committees of dialogue whose base is the discussion of the major national problems and which are the seeds of a non-partisan political force; and the construction of the new Aguascalientes as places for encounters between civil society and Zapatismo. Three months after these three initiatives were launched, the call for the intercontinental dialogue for humanity and against neoliberalism is almost complete, more than two hundred civic committees of dialogue have been organized in all of the Mexican republic, and today, 5 new "Aguascalientes" will be inaugurated: one in the community of La Garrucha, another in Oventic, Morelia, La Realidad, and the first and last one in the hearts of all the honest men and women who live in the world. In the midst of threats and penuries, the indigenous Zapatista communities and civil society have managed to raise these centers of civic and peaceful resistance which will be a gathering place for Mexican culture and cultures of the world (Ibid).

Last but not least, it is important to notice that as in other moments in which the EZLN succeeded in using peaceful resistance as a means for political mobilization, the strengthening of the alliance with the civil society resulted indirectly of other government political strategies, as for example, the disintegration of the National Intermediation Commission (CONAI) in 1996. The removal of the CONAI was not a minor incident in the broader context of a failed dialogue between the EZLN and the government along the

years. Nor was this the first time the EZLN withdrew from the talks as a result of the government actions. As mentioned earlier, in 1997 the EZLN withdrew during eighteen months after the massacre of Acteal. But even during this period the EZLN took great advantage and turn its ‘silence’ into an effective symbolic means of keeping the voice and the activism of the Zapatista resistance loud:

The space created by our absent word pointed out the empty and sterile word of he who orders by ordering, and thus others who had not listened to us and who looked at us with distrust became convinced. And so the need for peace with justice and dignity was confirmed in many. [...] We saw others whom we had not seen before. We saw new and good people join the struggle for peace, not us, but men and women who, able to opt for cynicism and apathy, chose commitment and mobilization instead. In silence we saw everyone, in silence we greeted those who sought and opened doors, and in silence we constructed this response for them. [...] We saw that, being quiet, our people's resistance spoke more strongly against deceit and violence (*fifth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle*).

### **Memories of an Intergalactic space**

Many people recall the Aguascalientes of Guadalupe Tepeyac, built to carry out the National Democratic Convention (1994), as the first time a ‘boat’ with thousands of peoples was seen ‘sailing’ in the mountains of the Lacandona jungle. This image, intentionally borrowed by Subcomandante Marcos from Werner Herzog’s film ‘Fitzcarraldo’,<sup>66</sup> could not evocate better the sense of unreality that surrounded this first attempt of the EZLN to built a place to organize a major public forum with the Mexican people, and get more than six thousand persons into the jungle to discuss with them a ‘new project for the nation’. Two years later, the Zapatistas dared to challenge the limits

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<sup>66</sup> The film narrates the story of Fitzcarraldo, a German icemaker in 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Herzog’s film, Brian Sweeney Fitzgerald, “Fitzcarraldo”, fantasized about lifting a steamboat over a mountain in the Peruvian Amazonia.



of imagination for a second time. This time, they invited people from all over the world to travel down into the jungle to agree in a common global strategy to fight against neoliberalism. This gathering was the First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism (best known as the *Intergaláctico*), carried out on July 27-31 of 1996.

The Aguascalientes of Guadalupe Tepeyac, had been destroyed in February of 1995, and a military base for the Mexican Army had been placed in its place. So the Zapatistas built five new Aguascalientes in the towns of Oventic, Roberto Barrios, Morelia, La Garrucha, and La Realidad. For a week thousands of ‘brothers and sisters’ from five continents and numerous countries traveled to stay in the Aguascalientes, from: Italy, Brazil, Great Britain, Paraguay, Chile, Philippines, Germany, Peru, Argentina, Austria, Uruguay, Guatemala, Belgium, Venezuela, Iran, Denmark, Nicaragua, Zaire, France, Haiti, Ecuador, Greece, Japan, Kurdistan, Ireland, Costa Rica, Cuba, Sweden, The Netherlands, South Africa, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, The United States, The Basque Country, Turkey, Canada, Puerto Rico, Bolivia, Australia, Mauritania, Norway, Colombia and, Mexico. By then, the EZLN had transformed the ‘conflict zone’ into a huge Zapatista Rebel Territory within 38 municipalities in Chiapas. The political momentum after the signing of the San Andres Agreements was as powerful as it was the increasing militarization and the LIW.

In this state of things, the fact of having broken the military and the information blockade to organize an international encounter inside the territories controlled by a clandestine indigenous army, and in one of the poorest regions of Mexico, is remarkable. First of all, the *Intergaláctico* brings us closer to a concrete historical moment in EZLN’s

relationship with civil society, a political momentum when the EZLN reinvented to itself as a (global) political movement by means of reinventing civil society as a global political subject:

The civil society we want is not a fortress but an open space, a single world where all men and women to fit in [. . .]. The civil society we want is that of sharing wealth, work and the modes of production. It is a society that seats the notion of us before the privileges of single persons, the notion of the ours before the notion of the mine, the notion of being before that of having and, the notion of community before individuality (*Crónicas Intergalácticas*, p.168).

And second of all, the encounter was the very first time the Zapatistas addressed and interacted with a mass of non-indigenous people from all over the world within the borders of their own declared territories. The topics discussed in the round tables (see fig.3), going from human rights, unemployment, external debt, environmental deterioration, to particular ideas about the new revolutionary subjects, or the use of networks and communication technologies for resistance, can be read in various ways.

### **Fig.3 The *Intergaláctico* (Tables of discussion)**

Table I. Aguascalientes I La Realidad What are the politics we have and what politics do we want.	All the cultures for everyone. And the Media? From <i>las pintas</i> to Cyberspace.
Table II. Aguascalientes V Roberto Barrios The economic question: Horror tales.	Table IV. Aguascalientes II Oventic, San Andrés Sacamch'en de los Pobres A society that is not a civil society?
Table III. Aguascalientes IV Morelia	Table V. Aguascalientes III Francisco Gómez A world in which many worlds fit

(Source: *Crónicas Intergalácticas*, Mexico: 1998)

But, from my perspective, the significance of the *Intergaláctico* arises from the fact that the EZLN used it as a symbolic political space to build up the alliance with the international civil society. And, also because the experience of the *Intergaláctico* transformed the Lacandona jungle into an international fashionable place, and even more importantly into a recognized space to organize resistance against neoliberalism on a global scale.<sup>67</sup> The full body of this sudden transformation can be grasped from the *Crónicas Intergalácticas* (1998).<sup>68</sup> Here the speeches of EZLN's Comandante David, Mayor Ana María, and Comandante Hernán sum up best the spirit of the encounter in the goal of discussing collective strategies to peacefully resist the neoliberal war against humanity, and plus, they offer a valuable insight into the symbolic and practical possibilities the EZLN is alluding to construct a 'space of dignity'.

The welcoming speech *Un mundo donde todos podemos caber* (A world where we all can fit), read by Comandante David in Oventic, speaks of the Aguascalientes as 'spaces' for 'encounter' and 'dialogue' between different people, people with different languages and cultures. Here, the focus on the purpose for dialogue is very important. The exchange of ideas, says Comandante David, is what allows people to be recognized in 'the others'. The true value of dialogue, he continues, rests in the possibility of thinking of a world where the respect to 'difference' could be recognized as a universal human need. In the same fashion, David made the point that in our time it is neoliberalism what is transforming this sense of 'difference' into a sense of solidarity and hence, into a reason to fight against the death and destruction of humanity by neoliberalism:

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<sup>67</sup> I am not echoing the slogan of 'thinking globally, acting locally', but rather I intend to show the objective connection between a universal spatial order and the necessity of organizing global resistance.

<sup>68</sup> For a summarized version in English see Ruggiero & Stuart, *Zapatista Encuentro*, (New York: 1998).

All brothers, let us all fight to build the world we need, let us all fight so some day it reins justice, democracy, liberty and true and new peace. Let us all fight to defeat injustice and death, let us all fight to build life and destroy death” (*Crónicas Intergalácticas*, p.17).

Mayor Ana María’s *Detrás de nosotros estamos ustedes* (Behind of us are you) is highly symbolic too, particularly in terms of the meaning of dignity. First, to explain to the international audience who the EZLN is, why the indigenous zapatistas are different from other people, and how the Zapatista Army is fighting against neoliberalism:

This is what we are. [ . . . ] The voice that is armed to speak her voice. The face that is hide to can be seen. The name that is silent to can be spoken. The red star that is calling men and the world so that they listen, so that they see, so that they are named. We are the tomorrow that it is harvested in the past (Ibid, p.25).

Then, to represent the EZLN as a product of the systematic negation of the essential elements that define human existence and dignity by neoliberalism. And to create awareness about the nature of the global threat posed by neoliberalism not only upon the indigenous peoples but for the entire humanity:

Behind our black face, behind our armed voice, behind our unspeakable name, behind of that us that you see, behind of us are you, behind the same simple and ordinary men and women who are repeated in all races, who are painted in all colors, who are spoken in all languages and who are lived in all places [...]. We are the same as you. Behind of us are you (Ibid, p.25).

And finally, *Todo para tener un espacio de dignidad humana* (Everything to have a space of human dignity), the speech read by Comandante Hernán in Francisco Gómez, is the one in which the Zapatistas have addressed and depicted the connections between space and dignity in a more extended manner. The force of the Zapatistas, says Hernán, is

the force of the ‘dignified work’ of the indigenous communities; work and dignity are the greatest strength of the EZLN struggle. The document is explicit to explain the role of the Aguascalientes as ‘spaces’ for the encounter with other indigenous and non-indigenous people, with Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas. The Aguascalientes are ‘spaces’ to develop a relationship between the human beings based on the respect of the human dignity. And they are spaces for all ‘the men and women with a dignified heart’ may fight together against neoliberalism:

It is a space where the countless dignified hearts fighting for a more human world fit. It is a space where an entire human world that fights against neoliberalism fits. It is a space where all the human hearts in the world fighting for democracy, freedom and justice fit. A space where indigenous and non-indigenous, Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas, put their value and their dignity for they can be known in color and face but also in thought and means of struggling with hope. A space to understand the future by understanding the problems that neoliberalism is creating now.

This *Aguascalientes* is a Zapatista town made by men, women and children who have given their work for all men and women that are fighting in the world with dignity. We have put our seed of work for this construction, carrying on our backs the materials that we see: for the places where we are, where we talk, for the places where now we are putting our sand grain to achieve a true peace: the Tzeltales, the Tojolabales, the Choles, the Tzotziles, everybody. [. . .]

Because as we work and harvest our *milpas*, here in this *Aguascalientes* we work the same way to harvest the future of humanity, the new life for humanity (pp.182-3).

At distance, the *Intergaláctico* remains as the first major public and non-partisan international forum organized in late 20<sup>th</sup> century to discuss and to build resistance against neoliberal globalization. It is remarkable that such public manifestation occurred not in a major city but in this indigenous rebel territory in the Mountains of the South East Mexico. And although the task of fully assessing its real political and revolutionary contribution is still pendant, yet the spirit of *Intergaláctico* has begun to be replicated, as

in Seattle, Washington during the WTO's World Ministerial Organization in 1999, and the First Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2000. But even so, the *Intergaláctico*, as a proposal to organize resistance against neoliberalism on a global level, brings about some limitations for political struggle. As I argued, the encounter was a major political step for the EZLN in their purpose of peacefully echoing the Zapatista cause among the international civil society, and also to create a symbolic space around notions of difference and respect for dignity. Though it is not clear to what extent these bases to call for international political mobilization might represent an effective means for building an alliance and a real opposition to a global class project such as neoliberal globalization.

The *Intergaláctico* partially answered this question by opposing direct democracy (democracy from below), to neoliberalism. But as with the former question, the margins of direct democracy are also uncertain. On the one hand, collective assemblies (such as the ones that were tried out in the encounter) are the main forums to discuss and take decisions concerning to the indigenous communities' common wealth. Collective discussion but also collective work is at the base of this way of governance. But on the other hand, the Zapatista communities are highly differentiated social structures in terms of division of labor, gender relationships, social discipline and hierarchical structures of governance. Therefore, there is a big risk in idealizing direct democracy as a feasible or mirror structure for global governance and political struggle. If in 19<sup>th</sup> century Marx identified and foresaw the proletarians of the world as the only subject capable to overcome the national frontiers and organize a class revolution against capitalism, today the *Intergalácticos* are recognizing in neoliberal capitalism an alike common enemy.

However, they are not proposing a class revolution but a moral revolution to defeat it.

The discussion is not over yet.

## CHAPTER FIVE WELCOME TO THE ZAPATISTA TERRITORY

Es mi deber comunicarle que tiene usted una rebelión indígena en el Sureste de la Nación [...]. Creo que ya es inútil advertirle que no se crea eso de “conflicto limitado a cuatro municipios” y lo de que los “acuerdos de paz se cumplieron en todo el estado de Chiapas, menos en la zona de conflicto”. Lo engañan señor Ernesto Zedillo, siempre lo han engañado. —**Subcomandante Marcos**, *Comuniqué*, December 20, 1994).<sup>69</sup>

### Getting into the Rebel Territory

To travel from the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas, in the highlands of Chiapas, to the Aguascalientes of Francisco Gómez, located at the entrance of the region of Las Cañadas in the Lacandona jungle, may take up to twelve hours using the local ground transportation. The initial hours of the journey are the easiest; perhaps a three-hour drive on the San Cristóbal-Ocosingo state highway. The collective vans depart from San Cristóbal every half-hour. I made this journey for the first time in 2002. I took one of the earliest rides to Ocosingo. The radio was tuned to the local station ‘*La Voz de la Selva*’

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<sup>69</sup> It is my duty to communicate that you have an indigenous rebellion in the Southeast of the Nation. [. . .] I believe that it is useless to warn you that your belief of a conflict “limited to four municipalities” is useless, and that peace agreements were completed throughout the whole state of Chiapas except in the conflict zone, is incorrect. They deceived you Mister Zedillo, they have always deceived you.



*and the news of the day* were about: a confrontation between teachers from a state primary school and ‘dissident’ teachers (presumably Zapatistas) in the community of Roberto Barrios; an up coming conference of the International Commission of Human Rights in San Cristóbal; the announcement of a major plan of Costa Rican investors to cultivate oil palm in the Ocosingo-Soconusco region, and lastly, about a peasant demonstration in Chicoasén, near the capital of Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

Later on, the van passed the town of Ku xul-ha, the place was occupied by the ‘Zapatistas on resistance’ who maintained an indefinite occupation of the official municipal building.<sup>70</sup> A banner reading ‘civil society supports the autonomous municipalities in resistance’ hung from the building walls. The van continued to ride up and down the hills for some time before entering the jurisdiction of the 39 Military Zone. The military facilities are conveniently located aside the highway and over a summit. From there the view of the city of Ocosingo is perfect.

Ocosingo is the head of the biggest municipality in the state. In the 1990s, the city concentrated nearly four percent of the total state population.<sup>71</sup> The city is considered to be the ‘door gate’ into the Lacandona jungle and it is a major hub for local and regional transportation, food supplies and the commercialization of coffee. Nevertheless, the city occupies a very special site in the people’s memory of the Zapatista rebellion. The urban municipal *mercado* (market) was the site war of one of the cruelest military confrontations between Zapatistas and federal soldiers in January of 1994. A likely number between 93 and a thousand Zapatista insurgents were killed in this place by the

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<sup>70</sup> Ku xul-há is head of the Zapatista Autonomous Municipality of Moisés Gandhi.

<sup>71</sup> See CIACH, *Para entender Chiapas* (Mexico: Impretei).

federal army, and the numbers of federal soldiers and civilians who died remain unknown.<sup>72</sup>

Upon leaving the *mercado*, there are still a few more miles of paved highway before reaching the secondary road to San Quintín, located near to the border with Guatemala, and now it is the site of the second biggest and best-equipped military headquarters in Chiapas. This road, which is composed by a muddy stretch of land, is virtually the only ground route into the Lacandona. Upon reaching this point, the traveling options for crossing the jungle were, a \$250 pesos (\$25 USD) for half-hour flight to San Quintín, or, as the majority of the local people do, choose the most economic option —\$50 pesos (\$5 USD) for an eight to thirteen hour trip aboard cargo trucks. In both cases the physical distance is the same—less than a hundred kilometers, yet there is a huge gap between the tourists, researchers, caciques, entrepreneurs, and the military, and the majority of the people who can only afford to travel through the *brecha*, the muddy secondary road.

The journey from here to Francisco Gómez is absolutely fascinating. The buildings of the Universidad Tecnológica de la Selva, the general headquarters of the 39 Military Zone, and the Maya archeological site of Toniná, flank the ‘door gate’ to the Lacandona. From that point on, the jungle is an astonishing continuum of human work and hence an invaluable source of wealth. Great extensions of deforested areas transformed into pasture grounds for livestock and the commercialization of timber, hectares of corn fields alternating with extended patches of abandoned agriculture fields, all sorts of people and commodities in motion: tourists, peasants, women and children,

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<sup>72</sup> The former data corresponds to the Ministry of Defense. The latter is the estimation made by the Dioceses of San Cristóbal. See Correa, et al., “El estallido que estremece a México” (1994).

foreigners and mestizos, Tzotzil, Tzeltal and Tojolabal indigenous, physicians traveling to the camps of the Red International Cross and the Physicians for Peace,<sup>73</sup> weapons, cattle, beans, woods, coffee, and corn along miles upon miles of wires and electricity post going in and out the relative wilderness.

This astonishing landscape is also the particular kind of place where a truck transporting and supplying Coca-Cola across the endless jungle, might bump into a military convoy carrying weapons and supplying Mexican soldiers who occupy several strongholds, located throughout the jungle. Interestingly, Coca-Cola and the Federal Army might even coincide with you —yes, at the same time and space— as you travel in a cargo truck full of Zapatista rebels, indigenous prostitutes, *mestizos*,<sup>74</sup> Italians, Germans, Swiss and, indigenous women feeding their children. This actually happened to me the first time I traveled through these southern lands.

### **The absolute geography of domination**

In 1994 the EZLN started to release signed communiqués from an unknown place “somewhere in the mountains of the South East Mexico”. This place corresponds more or less to a similarly indeterminate location in the Lacandona. Jan de Vos, a specialist on Mexican and Chiapas historiography, has portrayed the Lacandona as ‘una tierra para sembrar sueños’ (a land to seed dreams). And this is much more than a metaphor, it captures the richness of the life histories of those who have contributed to the production of the uniqueness of this social landscape. It is also an attempt to summarize the

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<sup>73</sup> Both international agencies left Chiapas a few years ago.

<sup>74</sup> In Mexico, ‘mestizo’ is both an ethnic and a cultural concept to refer to the native non-indigenous population. Its origin goes back to the conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlán by Spain in 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the racial mixture between the Spaniards and the native indigenous populations.

complexity of the experience of these individuals as historical subjects. As I intend to show in the following pages, this historical experience has transformed the Lacandona jungle into a recognizable, but highly unsettled geographical place. Throughout the years, both the indigenous peoples of the region and the state have been redefining its limits, meanings, practices, forms and contents, and in doing so, they have produced specific scales of domination and resistance.

According to De Vos (2002), the region's particular identity has been built from a diversity of 'geographic and human elements' that have shaped this 'socio-ecological' landscape.<sup>75</sup> This identity, he adds, is also the result of a 'multiplicity' of Lacandonas who have been produced according to specific interests and concerns:

The Lacandona Jungle is not only the natural and human mosaic created from the diverse geographical and human elements that modeled its identity as a region. It also includes the multiple Lacandonas built from the interests or concerns of those who came closer to her (p.21).

The author constructs this argument based on the different 'visions', or interests that political subjects and institutions, inside and outside the region, have had in transforming the place, and how they have established different (physical) boundaries for this space.<sup>76</sup> Some of these 'visions' are summarized in a set of maps illustrating major changes in the region from the 1970s to the 1980s. For me, the connection between this

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<sup>75</sup> Here the notion of region admits the possibility of recognizing certain natural/social homogeneity that can be approached from a multiplicity of conceptual preferences. Xóchitl Leyva offers an interesting argument on the use of *the region* concept as a heuristic tool. See Leyva & Ascencio, *Lacandonia al filo del agua* (México, 1996).

<sup>76</sup> His examples are interesting. The total extension of the Lacandona varies according to different criterion. For instance, for ecological purposes, the total extension is of 957, 240 hectares, whereas for administrative purposes, the number of hectares increases up to 2, 782, 180 hectares. See De Vos (2002, p.45).

general argument about a socially constructed multiplicity and its concrete representation over the absolute space represented in those maps opens a distinct possibility. It represents an opportunity to think of this absoluteness as a result of a concrete (political) or conscious use of space either for domination or resistance. Here are some examples.

A primary awareness of this spatial absoluteness is associated with the natural landscape and the dominance of a mountainous landscape in the physiographic regions of Chiapas (the Sierra Madre, the Highlands, the East Mountains, and the North Mountains). This image of a natural mountainous *homogeneity* is strongly attached to an extended representation of the Lacandona (located in the East Mountains region) as a backward, wild and geographically isolated place, and so with the state's equation of this geographical absoluteness with notions of disintegration, isolation, and economic backwardness. But on the other hand, as De Vos points out, if related to biodiversity, homogeneity becomes valuable as a local productive strategy for peasants, and at the same time it is highly valorized in terms of potential profits for the state and for transnational companies.

Other interesting examples include the way in which this absoluteness has been strengthening over time by means of the exploitation of natural resources and human occupation. The author offers a brilliant historical analysis of this transformation and concludes that in the last fifty years, the intensity and significance of these processes in the Lacandona have no comparison with any prior historical periods in the region. Nevertheless, he suggests a similar conclusion in terms of the destruction and the devastation of the jungle. In three decades, the advance of what he called major 'fronts of destruction' (wood exploitation, the opening of empty land for cattle, and agriculture)

have ‘devoured’ the woodlands in more than half of its original extension (pp.32, 35). On the other hand, in the same period of time the creation of a labour force supply in the Lacandona was oriented for the most part to wage workers for the primary (commercial agriculture and cattle) and secondary activities (forestry industries, and later on for hydro electrical development and even oil exploitation). The magnitude of this process can be inferred from the impact of human immigration over population growth and human settlements:

There are now more than 1, 000 human settlements that include colonies, small farms, ejidos, new population centers, ranchos and other small properties, which accumulate a total population of more than 200, 000 habitants. Comparing the former data with the calculated number for 1950 (close to 1, 000 colonists), for 1960 (near 10, 000), for 1970 (about 40, 000), for 1980 (approximately 100, 000) and for 1990 (near 150, 000), it can be conclude that population has growth hastily (Ibid, p.36).

Nevertheless, the impact is even greater if considering how the boundaries for the exploitation of natural resources and human colonization have been territorialized over larger extensions, modifying the prior physical limits of the Lacandona each time. The examples given by the author illustrate the land expropriations carried out by the federal government between 1957 and 1972—more than a million hectares, in the Gulf Coast Plain and the East Mountains regions. The ‘national terrains’ were extended North to South East, and across the municipalities of Palenque, Ocosingo, Trinitaria, La Independencia, La Libertad and Las Margaritas (Ibid, p.32). Then, a new major division of the Lacandona occurred according to the sequence of population settlement and migration to the jungle from the 1940s to the 1970s. And finally, in 1994 with the initial military offensive of the EZLN in the municipalities of Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las

Margaritas, and the following delimitation of the EZLN's civil resistance in the Lacandona.

A last example is the creation of the Biosphere Integral Reserve of Montes Azules (RIMBA). The natural reserve was decreed in 1978 over a surface of 331, 200 hectares. By decree, the government originally gave these terrains to 66 families of indigenous Lacandones in 1972. And so, as De Vos pointed out, with this action, the Lacandones acquired rights over a total surface of 614, 321 hectares, and therefore these families were transformed into a community of legal *latifundistas*. Even though, the creation of the RIMBA reduced the original surface yield to the Lacandones by nearly 50 per cent. What actually happened was that the government transformed a population of 5, 000 Tzeltales and Choles—who had already settled to live in the area, into 'illegal residents' and sudden invaders of federal property.<sup>77</sup> In sum, and taken the former examples, it can be argued that the limits between 'legality' and 'illegality' can be focus from the perspectives of how the political use of space lead to the absolute production of the Lacandona, and how this control and continues modification of the jungle's spatial borders has been crucial in the production of an accurate internal differentiation of space that separates labour force settlement from profitable natural resource areas.

In the same token, and although this differentiation began in the 1870's (when immigration and natural resources began to yield benefits in the region), according to De Vos, what makes these last 50 years qualitative significant is the presence of so-called *colonos selváticos*—native immigrants, indigenous women and men, who originally

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<sup>77</sup> The conflict between Lacandones and outsiders is extended to the name of this place itself. The name 'La Lacandona' was taken from the Lacandones, who nowadays are an ethnic and demographic minority -half a thousand peoples, in comparison to the more than 200, 000 colonizers from different ethnic groups and coming from outside the place. See De Vos, p.23, 33.

worked in the *haciendas*, *fincas* and forestry industries during the 1920s and 30's and who migrated to the jungle looking for land to sow and cattle during the 1940s. He also points to the transformation of these *colonos* into a brand new class composed of indigenous peasants and *avecindados*.<sup>78</sup> At first, the emergence of these *colonos* is qualified for the same tensions that on a national level transformed the land property relationships in the country after the 1910 Mexican Revolution, mainly the shift from private to the social tenure of the land given to the *ejidos*. However, as he points out, in Chiapas the land reform arrived three decades late, and it was never a real distribution of land for indigenous people but rather a state promoted invasion of empty, unproductive and commonly un-accessible lands in the Lacandona (p.48).<sup>79</sup>

For the *colonos selváticos* the emphasis is upon the social and political processes initiated by the new communities, and centers of population, to organize everyday life as well as production and commercialization and the organization of the communities' struggles around the land property and conditions of production in the region. Jan de Vos refers to these processes as key 'organizational processes' — forms of ethnic, social, political and religious organization, which provide a sense of order, cohesion and regulation to the communities' collective life at almost every level (p.43). Instances of these processes are the Unión de Ejidos Quotic ta Lecubtesel (Unión para nuestro Progreso), a regional peasant organization formed in 1975, at the time of a land conflict derived from the presidential decree to create the RIBMA. The Asociación Rural de

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<sup>78</sup> The Registro Agrario Nacional (National Agrarian Registration) recognizes as *avecindados* to Mexican individuals that have resided for one year or more time in the nucleus of the *ejido* lands.

<sup>79</sup> Other opinions have gone far as to conclude that in Chiapas the Revolution never came up because the power and the territorial control of *caciques* and *latifundistas* never resulted affected even after the Agrarian Reform (See Leyva (1996). In addition local historiography have gave a plenty account of the harsh history of political autonomy the *cacicazgos* have had to imposed their own rules over the state territories.



Interés Colectivo-Unión de Uniones (ARIC), integrated in 1981 by more than a hundred ejidos and twenty-five *rancherías* (p.41). And lastly, the, Alianza Nacional Campesina Indígena Emiliano Zapata (ANCIEZ) formed in 1991.

De Vos is one of the authors who have acknowledged ANCIEZ to be the ‘public face’ of the EZLN. The Alianza made its first public appearance on October 12, 1992 during a demonstration around the commemoration of ‘500 years of colonial oppression’ in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. During a well know episode, thousands of indigenous came to San Cristóbal from their communities and tore down the statue of the Spaniard conqueror Diego de Mazariegos. Because this was a very well coordinated operation, some analysts consider this to be, in fact, the very first public demonstration of the EZLN’s capabilities for mobilization.<sup>80</sup> Plus he connects these capacities with a series of processes occurring at different scales and temporalities: wood extraction, contemporary state latifundism, land invasions, the experience of emigration, biodiversity, the Guatemalan refugees, or the role of the so-called “autochthonous church” and the Dioceses of San Cristóbal.

### **The Zapatista Rebel Municipalities**

On the last days of December 1994, the EZLN’s CCRI released a series of military briefs informing the people and the governments of the world, the national and international press, and the insurgents, the militia, and the Zapatista bases of support, of the end of two major campaigns in Chiapas: *Paz con Justicia y Dignidad para los Pueblos Indios* (Peace with Justice and Dignity for the Indigenous Peoples, and *Guardián y Corazón del Pueblo* (Guard and Heart of the People).<sup>81</sup> Between December 11 and December 19, the EZLN

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<sup>80</sup> See also Carlos Tello, *La Rebelión de las Cañadas* (Mexico, 1995).

<sup>81</sup> See EZLN. *Documentos y Comunicados 2*, (Mexico: 1995).

advanced with their regular troops breaking the military blockade across 38 state municipalities: San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Ocosingo, Altamirano, Las Margaritas, La Independencia, Trinitaria, Chanal, Oxchuc, Huixtán, Comitán de Domínguez, Teopisca, Villa de las Rosas, Nicolás Ruiz, Socoltenango, Totolapa, Palenque, Salto de Agua, Amatenango del Valle, Venustiano Carranza, Tila, Sabánilla, Yajalón, Tumbala, Chilón, Huitiupán, Simojovel, San Andrés Larráinzar, El Bosque, Bochil, Chenalhó, Pantelhó, Mitontic, Sitalá, San Juan Chamula, Zinacantán, Ixtapa, Cancún, and Jitotol.

The EZLN declared these municipalities as Zapatista Rebel Municipalities (MREZ). The campaigns were carried as a combination of military maneuvers and peaceful resistance activities, without running into armed confrontation with the federal soldiers:

The 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th of December of 1994, Zapatista troops of the Divisions of Infantry 75th and 25th, First Corp of the Army of the Southeast, broke the military blockade in the Lacandon Jungle. [...] During these four days, protected by the terrain, the climate and by popular support, thousands of combatants were able to cross the line of the blockade [...]. Having completed this part, the Zapatista combatants got ready for the following stage of the military operation. On the 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th of December 1994, in maneuvers they called “of lightning” and “of unfolding”, and as a part of the campaign “*Peace with Justice and Dignity for the Indigenous Peoples*”, the combatants took possession of the following municipalities of the state of Chiapas [the municipalities are the ones listed above] with the support of the local civil population (*Documentos y Comunicados* 2, p.179).

From an overall perspective, ‘the breaking’ of the blockade had the important political effect of shattering the government’s infamous depiction of the Zapatista

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Although a detailed mention of the groups integrating the EZLN -insurgents, militia and bases of support- is not that common in the documents written by the EZLN or about them, the detail could be an important reminder of the fact that behind the unified idea of the ‘Zapatistas’ and/or ‘Zapatismo’ lies a rigid military structure interacting with the non-military collective structure of the indigenous communities.

rebellion as a ‘delicate situation’ limited to ‘four municipalities’. A portray initially made up by Zedillo’s government to minimize the magnitude and the nature of the conflict in Chiapas.<sup>82</sup> Yet, from a spatial perspective, the breaking —and after that, the declaration of the Zapatista Rebel Territory over a third of the 111 state municipalities— made a crucial statement about the spatial nature of the conflict, or better said about the objective relationship between space, domination and resistance.

The declaration of the rebel municipalities triggered an intensive and highly conflictive metamorphosis of local space, first by defying the state municipalities as a scale to exert and representing the power of the nation state, and then by re-appropriating these municipalities as a scale for the EZLN rebellion. At this stage, the transformation was centered on the declaration and the immediate re-naming of 38 state municipalities (see fig.4), the rejection of the federal and local government support (mainly on the areas of production, education and health services), the appointment of new indigenous councils for the rebel municipalities and last, the recognition of Amado Avendaño Figueroa as ‘Constitutional Governor of the Rebel State of Chiapas’.<sup>83</sup> Avendaño was the owner and then director of *El Tiempo* (now *La Foja Coleta*), a local weekly newspaper considered to be one of the few critical voices in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

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<sup>82</sup> In 2000, Vicente Fox, then a presidential candidate, made his own contribution by reducing the conflict of Chiapas not to a spatial but a ‘time’ issue. He promised to resolve the conflict ‘in 15 minutes’. Four years later, now as a president, Fox declared that the conflict was ‘history’ and that Chiapas was looking now to the future.

<sup>83</sup> These actions are listed in the referred military briefs.

**Fig.4 Zapatista Rebel Municipalities**

REBEL MUNICIPALITY	HEAD REBEL MUNICIPALITY	LOCALIZATION (OFFICIAL MUNICIPALITY)
Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas	Ejido Santa Rosa El Copán	OCOSINGO
San Pedro de Michoacán	Ejido Guadalupe Tepeyac	LAS MARGARITAS
Tierra y Libertad	Ejido Amparo Agua Tinta	LAS MARGARITAS, INDEPENDENCIA y TRINITARIA
Maya	Ejido Amador Hernández	OCOSINGO
Francisco Gómez	Ejido La Garrucha	OCOSINGO
Flores Magón	Ejido Taniperlas	OCOSINGO
San Manuel	Ranchería San Antonio	OCOSINGO
San Salvador	Ejido Zinapa	OCOSINGO

MUNICIPIO REBELDE	CABECERA MUNICIPAL REBELDE	LOCALIZACIÓN (MUNICIPIO OFICIAL)
17 de Noviembre		ALTAMIRANO y CHANAL
Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla		LAS MARGARITAS y COMITÁN DE DOMÍNGUEZ
Ernesto Ché Guevara		OCOSINGO
1° de enero		OCOSINGO
Cabañas		OXCHUC y HUIXTÁN

MUNICIPIO REBELDE	CABECERA MUNICIPAL REBELDE	LOCALIZACIÓN (MUNICIPIO OFICIAL)
San Andrés Sacamch'en de los Pobres		SAN ANDRÉS LARRÁINZAR
San Juan de la Libertad		EL BOSQUE
San Pedro Chenalhó		CHENALHÓ Y MITONTIC
Santa Catarina		PANTELHÓ y SITALÁ
Bochil		BOCHIL
Magdalena de la Paz		CHENALHÓ
Jitotol		JITOTOL
Cancuc		CANCUC
Ixtapa		IXTAPA

MUNICIPIO REBELDE	CABECERA MUNICIPAL REBELDE	LOCALIZACIÓN (MUNICIPIO OFICIAL)
Huitiupan		HUITIUPAN
Simojovel		SIMOJOVEL
Sabanilla		SABANILLA
Vicente Guerrero		PALENQUE
Trabajo		PALENQUE Y CHILÓN
Francisco Villa		SALTO DE AGUA
Independencia		TILA Y SALTO DE AGUA
Benito Juárez		TILA, YAJALÓN Y TUMBALÁ
La Paz		TUMBALÁ Y CHILÓN
José María Morelos y Pavón		OCOSINGO, ZONA DE MARQUÉS DE COMILLAS

(Source: *Documentos y Comunicados 2*, Mexico, 1995).

Nevertheless, as Burguete Cal y Mayor (1999) has also pointed out, the declarations of the MREZ were not isolated measures in Chiapas but rather part of a larger political uprising that also included civil society and various independent peasant and indigenous organizations demanding the redistribution of political power at the local scale whereby actions of civil disobedience.<sup>84</sup> As a matter of fact, Avendaño's appointment as 'Rebel Governor' happened just a few days prior to the declarations of the MREZ and constituted the first organized reaction against the electoral fraud that imposed the *priísta* (PRI member or representative) Eduardo Robledo as 'constitutional' governor.

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<sup>84</sup> Besides the declarations of the MREZs, the same author points out other actions of civil disobedience, like the taking of presidencies and Palacios Municipales (municipal buildings) in main regional heads, the depositions of municipal presidents, and the establishment of the Concejo Municipal Plural-Ampliado de Ocosingo.

On December 8, 1994, the State Democratic Assembly of the People of Chiapas (AEDPCH), an organization that described itself as “the legitimate representation of the organized people fighting for freedom, justice and peace” (*Transición*, p.9) refused to recognize Robledo’s appointment and instead recognized PRD’s Amado Avendaño as head of the ‘Rebel Government of Transition’ (GRT) for the period 1994-2000. The main tasks of the GTR were stated as follows. A) Reconsideration and redistribution of the land property. B) Retrieval of the state’s natural wealth and retrieval of its benefits for the people of Chiapas. C) Respect to the state’s sovereignty and to the autonomy of their municipalities, and the constitutional recognition of the RAP. And D) To establish a Constituent Congress (Ibid, p.9). The seat of the GTR was located in the facilities of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

The EZLN supported the GTR all the time, nonetheless leaving aside any further analysis of this rare political support of them for a party candidate,<sup>85</sup> the relevance of this entire episode can be analyzed in a different way, from the perspective of how the alternate forms of government established by both the AEDPCH and the EZLN concurred in two fundamental ideas that connected space, sovereignty and dignity.

First, in both cases, they proceeded to appoint a new government based on the people’s sovereignty as the right of the people ‘to alter or to modify’ their form of government (Art.39). In the first case, the appointment of Rebel Government was

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<sup>85</sup> The EZLN has been reluctant to establish any alliance with the political parties and it has always rejected the elections as an effective means for political struggle. Yet in this particular case, the relationship of EZLN with Avendaño went further his partisan affiliation with the PRD, and it continued until Avendaño’s death in April 2004. As journalist, Avendaño was among the ones who first interviewed Marcos during the siege of the Municipal Palace in San Cristóbal, and as the EZLN has acknowledged, he made the jump of EZLN into the global scale; he published and faxed the EZLN’s first communiqués to the international press from the local offices of *El Tiempo* (See: Hermann Bellinghaussen, “La vida en el tiempo de Amado Avendaño” (Mexico, 1994).

defended as an attempt to ‘recover’ the ‘spaces of dignity’ that are granted by the Constitution:

with these actions the *Chiapanecos* decided to change that past of ignominy; we are willing to recover the spaces of dignity that are ours and which are granted by the General Constitution of the Republic and by the state Constitution, beginning with the inauguration of a REBEL GOVERNMENT OF TRANSITION. This Government of Transition, as its definition indicates, is transitory; we will transit of having illegal governments to legitimate governments that dignify in the future the will of the Chiapanecos (*Transición*, p.5).

And as for the EZLN, the declarations of the MREZs were a first step to organizing and scale up resistance —community, municipality, region, and eventually the nation— around the determination of having a ‘legitimate’ government. As I argued in the analysis of the DSLs, here the notion of sovereignty embraces not only the right of the people to have a legitimate government, but also respecting ‘the dignity’ of indigenous peoples whereby recognizing the practices that constitute the very bases of the communities’ social being: customs and traditions, territory and government.

There is a second important correspondence between the Rebel Municipalities and the GTR; both were similarly constructed around a same quality: they were organized as pluri-ethnic government structures.<sup>86</sup> This quality results particularly significant to put in context the nature of the Zapatista demand for a ‘space of dignity’. In 1992, a constitutional reform to Art.4 of the Constitution recognized for the first time the ‘pluri-cultural composition’ of the nation, and that this quality is sustained ‘originally on its indigenous peoples’:

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<sup>86</sup> Although there is an important difference here, the EZLN defines this pluri-ethnic composition in regard to the indigenous, and the GTR does it in reference to the participation of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples or *mestizos*.

The Mexican Nation is one and it is indivisible. The Nation has a pluri-cultural composition sustained originally on its indigenous peoples that are those that descend of the populations that originally inhabited in today's territory in the beginning of the colonization and that preserve its own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, or part of them (*Constitución Política*, p.2).

In short, if ethnicity is recognized as one of the nation's fundamentals, so the EZLN was legitimately appealing to this concrete representation of the nation and organized a new form of government accordingly.

Last but not least, the making of the rebel territories in this first stage of re-appropriating and territorializing forms and contents of resistance upon the spaces of the state, was necessarily uneven and conflictive. On the one hand, as Burguete (1999) has pointed out, the 'demarcation' of the Zapatista rebel municipalities was not homogenous but it occurred like a progressive 'adhesion' of families and communities to the rebel government:

The rebel municipalities were integrated by a hard nucleus, composed by a group of communities whose members had accepted, in an almost unanimous way, to ascribe themselves to Zapatismo. Around this hard nucleus there existed other agglutinated communities where the unanimous consent didn't exist and where the declaration of adhesion to the new government Zapatista was limited to groups and fractions inside the communities that have decided to ignore the state community governments and to recognize then the Zapatista jurisdiction. In the periphery they were other smaller groups, sometimes limited to groups families that for diverse reasons -always preceded by conflicts of another nature like agrarian, family, religious- to be isolated of the community life, ignoring to the local authorities and adhering to the government of the rebels (p.255).<sup>87</sup>

And, on the other hand, the 'demarcation' of the MREZ created a fuzzy and conflictive sense of territoriality. The rebel municipalities were not enclosed spaces with

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<sup>87</sup> In the book, Burguete presents a detailed analysis of the different phases of the political development of the MREZ. She includes four phases: the declaration phase, the election of new authorities (municipal council), the installation phase, and the consolidation phase.



recognizable political limits (as the constitutional municipalities were), but even so they began to overlap with the constitutional municipalities creating a conflict for the exercise of the local government, the land distribution, agrarian conflicts, tax collection, religious conflicts, or the access and control of natural resources.<sup>88</sup>

However, the major reaction against the rebel municipalities came from the state and its armed forces. On February 9, 1995, Ernesto Zedillo ordered a new major military offensive against the EZLN and the rebel municipalities. The Army advanced into the Zapatista Rebel territory and shattered the Aguascalientes of Guadalupe Tepeyac to build a new military base. The president Zedillo addressed the nation to unveil Subcomandante Marcos' 'true' identity; he was identified as Rafael Nicolás Guillén, a former student of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Zedillo also announced the arrests of three alleged EZLN's commanders in Mexico City: Javier Elorriaga, Elisa Benavides, and Jorge Santiago.<sup>89</sup>

Because of these government actions, the rebellion and the making of the rebel territories entered into new stage: the phase of an escalating militarization and the LIW against the Zapatistas and its supporters within the national and international civil society: "Official sources reveal that almost 40 thousand soldiers occupy the narrow canyons of the forest and near 60 thousand the state of Chiapas: this is the true dimension of the conflict and the biggest obstacle to the distension." (*Documentos y Comunicados* 2, p.311).

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<sup>88</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>89</sup> I had the opportunity to interviewed Jorge Santiago in San Cristóbal de Las Casas in 2004. He is collaborating with Desarrollo Económico y Social de los Mexicanos Indígenas, DESMI, an NGO working with the indigenous communities in Chiapas to advise and 'to accompany' them in the development of their own processes of economic development. The interview is included in chapter 6.

### A ‘mirroring’ experience

In 1999, the Catalan writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán went to the Lacandona and interviewed Subcomandante Marcos. The interview was later published as a book, *El señor de los espejos*, and in it Montalbán described Marcos as ‘the Lord of the mirrors’, a sort of sorcerer whose greatest trick has been the one of having taken the mirrors of the neoliberal dream in his hands, and to incite Mexican society to breaking them:

There is Zapatismo, like a mirror for the socialist viceroys of the empire. The mirror sprout of Marcos’ hands, and in each one of them it sprout a fragment of the broken utopia of the neoliberal paradise and of the social-liberal project that work only to maintain the social cohabitation of the richest societies and with more capacity of accumulation, and so to maintain the figure of the benefactor State (p.240).

Nevertheless, in the same interview, Marcos’ reply to the writer was that the metaphor of the mirrors could not really work unless the people were able to recognize that the image reflected on the mirror—that of themselves and the reality they see, was a false image, an illusion. Only in this way would people dare to break the mirrors and see who they really are, and where are they going. To a great extent, Montalbán’s metaphor summarizes what the effect of Zapatismo was during the first decade of struggle. But on the other hand, the image allows me to describe the experience of approaching the people, meanings, spaces, places, rhythms and representations that make of the rebel territories first and foremost dimensions of the human experience, of everyday life experiences of people and indigenous communities, but also of their experiences of domination, war and resistance.

Here, in the rebel territories, a lot of events continue to unfold right in front of your eyes but you might be not able to see them. You could be traveling or talking to a

Zapatista insurgent without even noticing it. Other times, it does not matter if you maintain your eyes wide open and alert, you will never be sufficiently prepared to face, without fear, the sight of a soldier with a rifle pointing at you each time you pass by a military post in Las Cañadas. Neither will you know or even imagine what will be your first reaction when you see military helicopters flying above the Zapatista communities. From this perspective, I do consider my own journey to the rebel territories as a similar ‘mirroring’ experience, one of creating an ethnographic account in which I could recognize some of these mirrors, while breaking others and simultaneously attempting to account for others ones, which I am sure, I was unable to fully identify. And so my next images and narratives of the rebel territories have all the advantages and disadvantages of having ‘seen’ life in the rebel territories through ‘the eyes’ of what a Mexican citizen, a woman and a volunteer from civil society would have experienced and expected on this regard. Yet I look to this experience as an opportunity to approach a concrete moment in the making of the rebel territories.

The period during which I did my initial fieldwork (Spring 2002) was one of transition and relative ‘openness’ for the Zapatista territories. The Zapatista communities maintained a tactic of political disobedience against the government and, at the same time, they began to play a more significant role in the materialization of the autonomic practices, and the simultaneous re-symbolization and re-signification of space, in order to make the rebel territories visible, meaningful and (politically) autonomous. A year had passed since the March for Dignity and the approval of the so-called Indigenous Law, and the inauguration of the Caracoles was still a while away. The Aguascalientes literally stood as the main ‘door gates’ for all the non-indigenous people to get ‘in’ and ‘out’ of

the MAREZ. And they were strengthened as spaces for encounter and peaceful resistance through a more coordinated work with civil society.

### **The Aguascalientes of Francisco Gómez**

I traveled as a *brigadista* (civil observer) of the CDHFBC, to one of the Civil Camps for Peace coordinated in the Lacandona region. My travel companions were not Mexicans but Europeans: a young Italian woman, two young men from Switzerland, and a German man. At the time, all the *brigadistas* assigned to any of the camps had to travel to the Aguascalientes of Francisco Gómez to be accredited by the Zapatista authorities. The location of Aguascalientes at the entrance of Las Cañadas region was strategic for the coordination and control of the access and constant movement of civil observers and volunteers from Enlace Civil and “Frayba” in the Lacandona region.<sup>90</sup> The Aguascalientes was the head of the Rebel Autonomous Municipality of Francisco Gómez, within the limits of the state municipality of Ocosingo.

Back to 2002, all the visitors who entered to the Aguascalientes had to literally cross a door gate, a post guarded by volunteers of Enlace Civil.<sup>91</sup> The post functioned not only as a kind of official entrance but also as a surveillance station intended to observe the crossing of Mexican soldiers to the nearest military base in Patihuitz, a community located less than a mile from this place. After crossing the post, a narrow path led the visitors up to the center of the Aguascalientes and once there, it was almost impossible not to be taken aback with the natural beauty of the mountains that shelter the place, and

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<sup>90</sup> “Frayba” is the local nickname for the CDHFBC.

<sup>91</sup> Then Enlace was the main coordinator of the civil observers staying in any of the Aguascalientes in the Zapatista Territory.

as I experienced, to find yourself overwhelmed with the deepest of emotions of having finally arrived to this place.

Sooner or later, the visitor will come across a colorful mural painted on the walls of three big huts. The images are simple almost child-like: a big mountain, white clouds, a blue-sky, horses, cows and pigs laying on green grass. However, what made the images so unique were the words of Subcomandante Marcos written in big white bold letters across the mountains and the grass: “LA ESPERANZA ES COMO LAS GALLETAS DE ANIMALITOS, NO SIRVE DE NADA SI NO SE TIENE DENTRO” (Hope is like animal cookies, it is of no use unless it is inside of you). Suddenly the visitor realizes the painted animals are gigantic animal cookies!<sup>92</sup>

In fact, color, or better said, pictures, drawings and murals are the most immediate signals that you are in Zapatista territory. Every image is unique and distinctive of each of the Aguascalientes. They represent a ‘look’, a visual memory of all those non-indigenous people who have come down to these lands in support of the EZLN and its struggle. Through the years, these pictures have become a symbol and a tool for political and cultural resistance within rebel territories and outside of them as well. All the painted images, entire ideas and the messages must be discussed and agreed upon by the Zapatista communities.

In Francisco Gómez these visual memories are everywhere: the image of Emiliano Zapata (the 1910 Mexican revolutionary and of whom the EZLN has taken its name and spirit) is painted on the walls of the school; the Assembly building is decorated

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<sup>92</sup> Throughout the years, hope and animal cookies have become one of the best-known and stronger symbols of the Zapatista resistance. After all, it is true the Zapatistas are fighting for major political goals such as democracy, justice, peace; but these goals are attached to the simplest –and maybe the greatest– of the everyday human expectations: hope.

with a black, white and red drawing of Pedro Valtierra's famous photograph depicting a human shield formed by Zapatista women repelling Mexican soldiers. There are painted flowers, children, maize, ski masks, Zapatistas, arms, children, women, men, and various other images.

The Aguascalientes has a primary school and a library. The library is small, but as other libraries that have been constructed in other Aguascalientes, it has a special place in the Zapatista history of resistance. As with the paintings, libraries are the result of collective work carried out in collaboration with civil society in order to build and maintain them as live symbols of political struggle. For that reason, both murals and libraries have been some of the main targets to be destroyed by the federal Army.<sup>93</sup>

There is a small coffee shop, a collective kitchen and two cooperative stores. One of them works also as a small cafeteria, and is attended by brigadistas of the Smaliyel Coffee Cooperative, and the other by the Zapatista women. Both of them function also as regional centers for the commercialization of coffee produced in the rebel municipality. There is a basketball court and several huts that are used for multiple activities. The biggest were built for dormitories for the 200 participants who attended the *Intergaláctico*; others are smaller and basically are used as kitchen and the dormitories for the civil camp; another big one hut functions as an auditorium or to celebrate the community assemblies, and there is one more for the shoe store shop. The Zapatistas manufacture and sell handmade work leather boots for women and men. They have

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<sup>93</sup> In 1995, during the second military offensive the soldiers destroyed the mythical library in Guadalupe Tepeyac. In 1997, the Army entered to the community of Tierra y Libertad and tore down what was considered one of the most beautiful and politically significant murals ever painted in the rebel territories. Nevertheless, the mural has been reproduced in other places in support of the EZLN. There is one reproduction painted in the Jack Kerouac's Alley on the walls of the City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, C.A.

learned to manufacture these shoes from the famous *zapateros* (shoemakers) from the working class neighborhood of Tepito in Mexico City. A group of Tepito shoemakers came to the Aguascalientes in 1996 and taught the trade to the (men) members of the community.

All dwellings and public buildings are made of wood, *bajareque* (a material made of a natural fiber), metal sheets for the roofs and bare soil for the floors. The Aguascalientes have their own electrical and running water systems. Only the school has sewage disposal, but latrines have been built as needed. The church, the school, the library and the health center are the only constructions made of brick and cement.

Before the *Intergaláctico*, the name of this place was La Garrucha, which is the name of the *ejido* from where the majority of the Tzeltal indigenous families who now live here were originally from.<sup>94</sup> But during the *Intergaláctico* the Zapatistas gave the autonomous municipality the name of Francisco Gómez as a way of honoring one of the EZLN's founders who were killed by federal troops in Ocosingo in 1994.<sup>95</sup> At first glance, the question of a name appears simple: Zapatistas and their supporters refer to this place as Francisco Gómez; *priístas* (PRI members or representatives), non-Zapatistas, anti-Zapatistas and locals, utilized the name La Garrucha instead. However, the quotidian act of naming things and places constitutes another effective and immediate way of identifying the political identity of the locals in these lands and the travelers coming into or leaving the Lacandona.

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<sup>94</sup> As mentioned before, the *ejidos* corresponds to the form of social tenure of the land granted to peasants after the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Several families living in the same center of population and/or rural community integrate each *ejido*.

<sup>95</sup> Here in the Aguascalientes, people narrate this story but also the episode is mentioned in the memoirs of the *Intergaláctico*. Also Carlos Tello's book (1995) includes very specific details of Francisco Gómez, first as a Tzeltal indigenous peasant leader and after as a member of the EZLN's leadership.

For instance, in the simple act of paying for truck and buses fares, the prices may vary according to the name you tell the driver. And you might be charged an extra fare (as it happened to my companions and I) when we asked to be let off at ‘Francisco Gómez’ rather than at La Garrucha. This is the Zapatista name of the place now, and as we were later told, the local drivers are commonly not Zapatista supporters. It is like if the local names turned into a sort of political zip code. And if you are not indigenous, you may not have the chance of deciphering these codes correctly: you are assumed to be either a national, or more often, an international tourist and hence ignore ‘the right’ names, or you are a Zapatista supporter. Anonymity or political ingenuity is hard to find when traveling in the Lacandona.

My companions and I arrived to the Aguascalientes in the morning, and for hours the place remained practically ‘empty’. No one was there except for the children and us, the *campamentistas* –as the volunteers are called here. It was until the afternoon, when men returned from working in the *milpas*, that the entire place began to transform. People literally ‘descended’ to the Aguascalientes and gradually began to ‘inhabit’ the space. And, —as I later realized, they did so following an almost clock-precise work routine. Every activity is based on a rigorous schedule and discipline. Just as there is a strict division of labor there is also a strict organization of time. There is a time for work, a time to cook, a time for sleep, a time to eat, a time for leisure, a time for worships and religious festivities, a time for parties, a time for family and so forth, and of course, there is a time to gather and chatting with the *campamentistas*.

We were fortunate because the day of our arrival coincided with the second day of a religious festivity to celebrate the *Santo Patron*, or the Saint Patron of the community.



At night we were invited to share *galletas de animalitos* and hot coffee with the members of the community. Everything was already set up collectively in the kitchen. We, as guests, were indicated to help ourselves first, then the men and then, the women of the community and finally, the children. Later on, a *fiesta* (party) and a *baile* (dance) were organized as part of the celebration and everybody was invited. The *fiesta* began at 9:00 PM and finished sharply at 12 o'clock. A *banda* (music band) with a *teclado* (an electrical keyboard with speakers) was hired. Only few of the men but not the women, chatted with us at the *fiesta*, the rest of the people basically observed us or barely noticed our presence. As for us, we did the same, we sat at one of the corners in the basketball court watching people dance one of the Zapatistas' favorite songs then: "La del moño colorado" (the girl with the red bun).

And it was at that moment that the following thought crossed my mind for the first time: That day was my first one of travel in the Lacandona jungle, and at the end of the day, I understood that once you are in these lands, sooner or later, you realize how a mere act of observation becomes complicated by identities and images of 'yourself' and 'the other'. The subjective feeling of being treated and seen 'differently' because of the way you look, speak and dress, turns into a fundamental objective difference and (cultural) frontier between 'the indigenous' and the 'non indigenous' peoples. And so, it does not much matter if you are Mexican or a foreigner. In these lands, you are not indigenous and therefore you will be always 'looked' at as an outsider. And after this point, you have few chances to answer 'rightly' the most critical of question any indigenous men will ask to an outsider traveling along these lands: what are you doing in this place and where are you going to.

Out of the Aguascalientes this basic awareness about ‘yourself’ and ‘the others’ turns into an intricate process of collective representation and in some instances, these differences can be reflected unto the landscape. In divided communities, for instance, the differences between Zapatistas and *priístas* materialize in the living conditions. The best houses, those made with the best building materials, with brick walls and glass windows, sewage disposal, electric appliances and potable water, are the houses of the *priísta* families. In a visible contrast, the dwellings of the Zapatista families are easily recognized because of the lack of such living conditions. But paradoxically, at dusk the darkness of night illuminates these political differences and turns darkness into relative brightness that brightens the spaces of the Zapatista resistance. I will explain.

The communities in rebellion have translated these material differences into a basic political and spatial language and in fact, into a full attitude of proud resistance and dignity whereby the Zapatista families differentiate themselves from their political enemies: either *priístas* or the “ARICs” –the members of the Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo. For the EZLN, the political difference between them and the *priístas* is as important as the difference between the EZLN and the ARICs: “*Los ARIC se vendieron al gobierno*” –they sold themselves to the government, a Zapatista told me as if he were speaking of a war enemy. “*Ellos están aceptando las migajas que les tira papá gobierno*” – daddy government is threw it them some crumbs and they accept them. But the same man added, “*A ellos es a quienes se los va a cargar la verga*” – eventually, they are the ones who will get screwed over.

As a result of this political fragmentation, some of the ARIC families have moved to the communities where *priístas* and the soldiers live. And whenever this happens, their

houses and their land remain abandoned since these or any other family assets that have belonged to “the traitors” will never be used again by any Zapatista family. Others have moved to places where men can drink alcohol: “*Se van a donde hay trago*”, or where prostitution is permitted. In the entire rebel territories alcohol consumption and prostitution are strictly forbidden. In fact, the EZLN and their supporters in the civil society have permanently denounced both —the distribution of alcohol and prostitution— as counterinsurgency strategies promoted and utilized by the government to break down the resistance of the rebel communities.

In the making of the rebel territories, these basic tensions and how they are rearticulating, integrating and fragmenting the local space in a political way constitute a basic condition for resistance and therefore, a basic condition for the development of the autonomic practices that are sustaining and giving sense to the Zapatista Rebel Territory.



Bienvenido a Territorio Zapatista (Welcome to Zapatista Territory).<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Photographs by author.



Cathedral of San Cristóbal de las Casas.



Student Protest in the Palacio Municipal, San Cristóbal de las Casas.





Vivan la resistencias del mundo, San Cristóbal de las Casas.



Zapatista memorabilia, Temple of Santo Domingo, San Cristóbal de las Casas.



The outskirts of San Cristóbal de las Casas.



Tortillería “Primero de Enero”, San Cristóbal de las Casas.





The Highlands of Chiapas.



Bienvenidos a Territorio Zapatista, SCLC-Oventic Highway.





Zapatista Mural, Clínica Guadalupana, Caracol of Oventic.



Zapatista women and 'the Ché', Clínica Guadalupana, Caracol of Oventic.



A classroom in the Autonomous Secondary School, Caracol of Oventic.

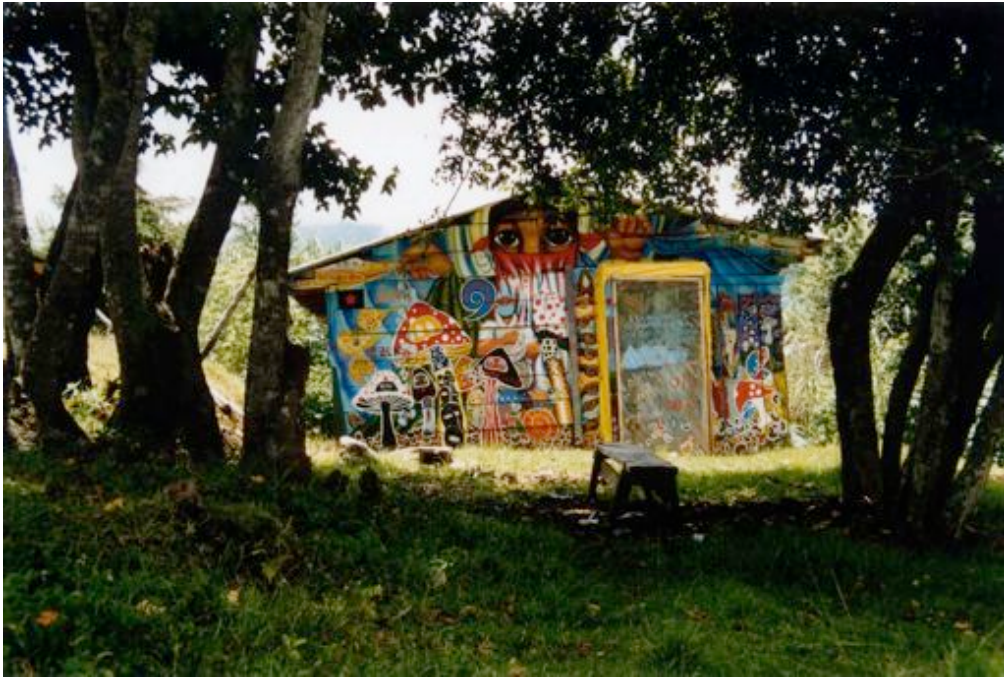


Office of an Autonomous Council, Caracol of Oventic.



"Clínica Guadalupeana", Caracol of Oventic.





In the Caracol of Oventic.



"Enter and Exit", Caracol of Oventic.





The Church and the Library, Caracol of Francisco Gómez.



The dormitory and the collective kitchen, Caracol of Francisco Gómez.





Inauguration of the Center “Compañero Manuel”, La Culebra.



Inauguration of the Center “Compañero Manuel”, La Culebra.



The Commencement Ceremony, La Culebra.



## CHAPTER SIX THE WORKINGS OF RESISTANCE

A strategic act is likewise a possibility of constructing a new space, a place where people may grow up different, as with seeds in agriculture. For agriculture, the most important thing is to create the conditions to have a fertile land, because all the seeds flourish in a fertile land. — **Jorge Santiago**, Interview, July 2004.

### ¡Aquí ya no hay bola!<sup>97</sup>

San Cristóbal de las Casas, the city the Zapatista Army seized in 1994, is a space made up of contrasting urban experiences and visual narratives, which are closely intertwined with people's everyday experiences of the city. For the visiting observer, San Cristóbal is a captivating urban landscape criss-crossed by multiple (observable) images of local identities: *coletos*, indigenous, tourists, foreigners, *mestizos*, police and military personnel, *campamentistas*, *caravaneros* and other NGO urban species.<sup>98</sup> The *coletos* are highly vigilant of people and of all that happens in their small town. One night as the locals walked in the park and gathered at the *zócalo* (central square), or bought and ate the traditional homemade candy for the Catholic celebration of Corpus Christy, a few

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<sup>97</sup> The phrase is a colloquial expression when people are referring to the stay of calm after experienced a complicated event or situation. It can be translated to English as: There is no conflict anymore here.

<sup>98</sup> *Coletos* is the gentile for the natives of San Cristóbal. *Campamentistas* and *caravaneros* are local nicknames for the volunteers participating with the NGOs, and in the caravans traveling to the Zapatista communities to help deliver the aid of the civil society.

others paid attention to a student meeting of the ‘Escuela Normal Indígena Intercultural Bilingüe Jacinto Kanek’, who had set up a campsite in front of the Palacio Municipal.

The indigenous students were demanding the state government of Chiapas to respect its compromise to keep providing economic support for the school, the only post-secondary institution in the state devoted to training bilingual indigenous teachers. A main speaker addressed the people in Spanish while another student translated the speech into various indigenous languages, whereas the other demonstrators chorused Zapatista slogans such as ¡*Zapata vive, la lucha sigue!*” (Zapata is alive and the struggle continues).

—“They are Zapatistas! Now what do they want.” A middle-aged *coleta* murmured angrily to his wife as they walked quickly past through the student camp. I followed the scene from one of the benches in the park where I had been chatting with a *coleta* in her late thirties. —“You’re not from San Cristóbal, are you?” The women asked, noticing that I was eating popcorn and not the traditional candy. We chatted for about 15 minutes, during which time she recalled the night when the Zapatistas seized the city back on the New Year’s Eve of 1993:

At night, some boys were running on the streets screaming that bandits or vandals were in the park and advising us to better stay at home, this was on December 31. The next day, the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, my family and I decided to go out and see what was happening in the park. The park was totally seized by the Zapatistas, and the streets covered with scratched paper and documents from the Palacio Municipal. It was a mess, it was chaotic! And “el Sup” [Marcos] was there, walking and speaking with people. He was saying to people that ‘they’ [the Zapatistas] have come here to liberate us and not to hurt the people and, he was also asking that we support the rebels. But I think it was all a lie, because things have not changed for the indigenous. But today everything is different; *Aquí ya no hay bola!* Everything is calm down now. Besides I believe that Marcos is not Marcos any more, he is a different person now; because the first Marcos was really handsome.

I saw him that day, and this new Marcos, the person that we're seeing now is not a good-looking guy.<sup>99</sup>

San Cristóbal is crossed and fully impregnated with the experience of the Zapatista struggle. As mentioned earlier in this work, for those who have examined the history of this indigenous struggle from within, the Zapatistas seized the city for the first time not in 1994 but on October of 1992—the Fifth centenary of Columbus Day. Then, hundreds of indigenous belonging to a peasant organization (ANCIEZ), came down from the mountains and torn down the statue of the Spanish conqueror Diego de Mazariégos, protesting against the “celebration” of a 500 year-old history of domination of the indigenous peoples in America.<sup>100</sup> On January 1 of 1994, the Zapatista rebels attacked another important symbol of the indigenous domination in the city: the Palacio Municipal, and declared war on the state and its army forces from this very place. And in 2003, thousands of rebels returned to the city once again this time to commemorate the nine anniversary of the Zapatista uprising. The celebration was carried out in front of the Cathedral of San Cristóbal, the site where peace negotiations took place in 1994.

The urban landscape features other strong images that symbolize the city's connections with the past and the present of the Zapatista struggle. For instance, the street graffiti expressing support for the Zapatista struggle and for other resistance movements around the world: ‘*Vivan las resistencias del mundo!*’ (Long live resistance in the world), ‘*Gora la autonomía, Viva el EZLN!*’ (Long live autonomy [in Basque], Long live the EZLN); or in the political propaganda displayed on the streets: ‘*Recuperemos nuestra*

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<sup>99</sup> San Cristóbal de las Casas, fieldwork notes, May 2004.

<sup>100</sup> See chapter five.

*ciudad*’ (Let us recover our city), ‘*Todos somos San Cristóbal*’ (We all are San Cristóbal).<sup>101</sup>

And likewise it is possible to observe in the landscape some of the effects of the neoliberal destruction the Zapatistas have denounced, for instance, the effects of an increasing migration of the Mexican labor force to the U.S. There, on the streets or in the bars of the less touristy neighborhoods of the city, it is possible to recognize the young indigenous migrants who have returned from ‘the North’. The city is also witnessing a boost of local money transfer businesses intended to receive the migrant’s remittances, like the Banco Elektra, owned by one of the most successful entrepreneurs in Mexico.

The outskirts of San Cristóbal are noticeably inhabited by indigenous populations. These are mostly immigrants from the inner indigenous regions who have come to the city in search of work; they are also indigenous families who have been expelled from their communities for belonging to Protestant denominations rather than to the Catholic faith. These migrants arrive into the city’s downtown on a daily basis and congregate in the markets to work and/or to sale their merchandise, e.g. handmade goods and ceramic crafts, fruits and vegetables, raw foods, clothes, hats, and other products controlled by *colecto* and *mestizo* merchants. One such place is the street market at the Templo y Ex-Convento de Santo Domingo (The Temple of Santo Domingo). This famous local market for Chamula indigenous is where tourists come to buy stuffed figurines and other Zapatista souvenirs —“¡Llévese al ‘Sup’ güerita!” (Come get your ‘Sup’ güerita), is the

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<sup>101</sup> Fieldwork notes, May 2004. The first slogan corresponds to the campaign of Sergio Lobato García (the PRI’s candidate to the municipal government of San Cristóbal in 2004), presumably making reference to the compromise of recovering the city of the violence provoked by the Zapatista rebellion. Respectively, ‘*Todos somos San Cristóbal*’ was the campaign slogan of Rubisel Guillén Román, the contender of the PAN. It intends to be a re-phrasing of the EZLN’s ‘*Todos somos Marcos*’ (We all are Marcos).

phrase a tiny Chamula woman uses to try and convince tourists to buy a ‘Sup’ Marcos, or Comandanta Ramona, figurine from her.<sup>102</sup> These are, after all, “the people’s favorites.”

To some extent, the sale of Zapatista memorabilia (postcards, t-shirts, pins, *paliacates* (bandanas), badges, and so on) — either by the indigenous on the streets, or in the tourist stores owned by the *coletos* — has become a contradictory symbol, which circulates and feeds the city’s economy. On the one hand, the sale of objects such as these signify an extra income for the local tourist economy under the control of the *coletos* and *mestizos*, who in turn are identified by the Zapatistas with the classes that have traditionally exercised power against the indigenous peoples in the city and in the state. But on the other hand, the sales to tourists contribute to support a minor economic circuit composed of small family businesses that sell the Zapatista memorabilia but also goods such as coffee, honey, clothing and boots, which are produced by the Zapatista communities in resistance. A part of the profits are returned to the communities.

From this perspective, the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas can be seen both as a frontier and as a scale of the Zapatista resistance, or even symbolically as one of the outer layers of the Zapatista Caracoles.<sup>103</sup> So far, the Zapatista struggle has opened up the space and the history of the city through numerous symbolic and material layers that are themselves the subject for future investigation. One such layer is the story of the “Colonia Primero de Enero”, a slum on the outskirts of the city whose name literally refers to the date of the Zapatista uprising: “First of January”, and a place where the

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<sup>102</sup> The adjective ‘güerita’ would be translated to English as ‘blonde’, however the use and the meaning of the word in Spanish makes reference to a racial/class content in which *mestiza* and non-indigenous women —whether Mexican or foreigner— will be called as “güera” or “güerita” as a compliment to differentiate them from the dark-skin and low-class indigenous women.

<sup>103</sup> I am using the concept of ‘frontier’ in a broad sense to refer a vital element to organize space, to open up space, or to establish material and symbolic borders to defend the land, the property, the nation, the city, the community, the identity.

streets featured the names of major Zapatista leaders and sites: “Subcomandante Marcos Street”, “Comandante Germán Street”, “La Realidad Street”, “Morelia Street”.<sup>104</sup>

### **‘The accompaniment’ of civil society**

In this broad perspective where several class, race, gender, and cultural layers are organizing the space of the city, there are other important layers that have transformed San Cristóbal into a place in which the Zapatistas can mobilize resistance outside of the Rebel territory. San Cristóbal is a central place for organizing the work of numerous non-profit and grassroots organizations that work in solidarity and support of the Zapatista resistance in different ways and spatial levels. It is not my intention to present an extensive analysis of this theme, but rather to present the points of view of the people who are doing this work as part of the collaborative relationship of civil society, the EZLN and the Zapatista communities.

The following perspectives share the idea of *‘el acompañamiento’* (the accompaniment), a notion referring to the collaboration and solidarity work in which individuals and organizations support and work with the communities to help them identify their needs and work with them in helping to develop their own solutions. The information is based on interviews I conducted in San Cristóbal in 2004. These interviews are presented as excerpts I translated from the original interviews from Spanish into English. I have organized the excerpts in two formats: by subject, or using a Q&A layout in order to facilitate the presentation. In the former case, the original

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<sup>104</sup> The history of this place remained a mystery for me. During the fieldwork investigation in 2004, the current residents did not want to speak about the theme, and no reliable information could be gathered, except for an urban map (n.d.), where the streets are identified with the mentioned Zapatista names. None of those names remained today, though some local businesses still have the name ‘Primero de Enero’.

interviews were longer and conducted as opened interviews. I edited the contents by selecting the specific sections that better illustrates the theme of 'the accompaniment'. I chose the heads of each subject at the end, but the contents correspond to the original commentaries of the interviewees. All the interviewees agreed to use their real names.

**Jorge Santiago, San Cristóbal de las Casas, July 2004.**

*Co-founder of Desarrollo Económico y Social de los Mexicanos Indígenas (DESMI), a non-for-profit organization created in 1969. DESMI supports community projects in the following areas: sustainable development, agriculture commercialization, autonomous education, and citizen participation in Chiapas.*

**The particular and the global**

There are two key elements to the way in which the EZLN has been constructing political spaces. The first is the relationship between the particular and the global. For the first time, the indigenous populations of Chiapas are at the center of the world, and they can be a part of the global relationship that is the relationship with society. The second element is the temporal dimension, the process of constructing this relationship between the particular and the global is a long-term process, which is why the temporal dimension is equally fundamental: time is movement, time is a producer. This is a process meant to create alternatives for the indigenous populations, but also one of searching their own solutions; it represents a notion of allowing 'the different' [the indigenous] to be a part of the particular and the global. And it is an idea that focuses on the relationship between the present and the future; it is the construction of the future.

### **The revolutionary subject**

The JBG and the Autonomous Municipalities are not the end but only the means, the instruments or a route through which to build new relationships: we are before the long-term creation of a revolutionary subject, a subject with new elements at his hands. And here, it is important to emphasize that the future of this long-term creation rests on young people and on their new found capacities for mobilizing. In other words, the future of this project lies in the possibility of passing on these new capacities to the next generation, and in the opportunity of providing the young with a different ideological model for social struggle. The new generations are thinking about their social struggle as a process, as a possibility of creating, and as an opportunity to construct the right to participate in the construction of alternatives. The new generations represent a fundamental sense of continuity, a possibility of transmitting a new way of living to these communities. Such is the great potentiality of this new model.

### **Autonomy and resistance**

The idea of autonomy can be applied to a person or a subject that is able to assume the responsibility of looking for alternatives. But on the other hand, autonomy cannot be thought of without resistance, one is autonomous because one is resisting, and one is resisting because one is autonomous. Therefore, resistance can be thought of as a rejection of relationships of dependency through autonomy; and so hence, for indigenous communities, resistance is the refusal of dependency upon the state and the mechanisms through which the state exercises control over indigenous communities.



Autonomy and resistance are processes that are internalized; i.e. resistance is a process by which individuals gain a personal sense of responsibility in regards to a new form of living, but it is also about assuming this responsibility as a historical necessity —the responsibility of practicing resistance in order to survive, to exist. Resistance is the symbol that provides meaning to the collective being. In addition, autonomy is the basic act or activity necessary for the construction of the resources needed to live in a society. Such resources include land, healthcare, food, justice, etc.

Autonomy implies a sense of feeling oneself fully connected to the world, to the totality, and this is the meaning of what the Zapatistas are saying: “Everything for all; nothing for us.” Furthermore, autonomy is also about a process of constructing the new meanings involved in this relationship between autonomy and resistance, it is about the need to define new standards, values, goals, and likewise, about learning how to name them, to assign new meanings to words like markets, equality, justice, dignity, work. And to do this, you do not have to be Zapatista, but simply to share the possibility of working together to achieve an autonomous society.

### **Walking your own path**

The Zapatistas are constructing resistance and autonomy under very restrictive conditions, and they must confront such obstacles as the military blockade, a political blockade, and a permanent threat of annihilation, therefore Zapatismo must work with small goals in mind, with small and concrete actions as an objective. And here some metaphors might help to better explain this idea: “It will always be better to walk a step on your own path, than to walk on somebody else’s road all the time,” “It is better to be a

mouse's head than to be a lion's tail." In other words, the best is for one to always carry out small and perhaps less spectacular actions, because, in the end, through these actions one will walk at one's own pace, and on one's own path.

And here, there is also a relationship between the qualitative and the quantitative: "When one is sick, it is never enough to simply get the cure, one must be healthy." So this path is constructed step by step, day after day, but upon arrival, one does no longer beg for the material resources nor for their meanings, rather one creates them, appropriates them, and maintains them. In other words, one is no longer outside of the road, but on it.

And this fullness of living can only be achieved coherently through an agreement, by listening to others and by walking next to them. This fullness of living is constituted by the relationship between what people want and how they make that possible. These are strategic acts, actions that ensure the subject's survival, but they are also actions based on a possible solution, and also actions that are thought of within a holistic vision of how to construct these possibilities.

## **Space**

A strategic act is likewise the possibility of constructing a new space, a place where people may grow up differently, as with seeds in agriculture. For agriculture, the most important thing is to create the conditions to have a fertile land, because all the seeds flourish in a fertile land. The Caracoles are these new spaces, they are spaces in which people do not have to feel shame, fear or doubt anymore, the Caracoles are spaces to dream, to live with respect, spaces where people have rights, spaces to be free.

And the Good Government Juntas are strategic acts, they play a strategic role in this holistic vision for the construction of the possibility. That is why they have a territorial reference, and to some extent, a sense of property, because now it is necessary to create the material conditions to have the fertile land where the new way of living will flourish. Besides, this sense of space is important because it offers the notion of freedom and a sense of territoriality. In other words, for the time being recognizing and practicing this sense of territoriality is important for Zapatismo, but for the Zapatistas it is equally critical that others recognize this territory.

**Onésimo Hidalgo, San Cristóbal de las Casas, July 2004.**

*Training and Political Formation coordinator at Centro de Investigaciones Económicas y Políticas para la Acción Comunitaria (CIEPAC). In its website the center is defined as “a civil organization that accompanies the social movements in Chiapas, Mexico and MesoAmerica, as well as the global struggles that seek to build a more democratic world, with justice and dignity for all”. The activities of the center included: research, information-dissemination, education, training and analysis. Founded in 1998.*

*Q. Is the current stage of the Zapatista resistance –that began with the inauguration of the Caracoles, a new strategy to face the government's political-military strategy?*

A. The government and the Army are attacking the EZLN using political and military power but the EZLN is not responding to this logic. They are as the bamboo tree. The bamboo is a tall and thin tree with many leaves, when the wind blows, the bamboo opposes no resistance but rather it twists its body to let the wind pass through its leaves, and then it straightens out firmer than before. This is the strategy of the EZLN, whereas the government is displaying a huge political, military and counterinsurgency operative, the EZLN is not responding to that, it is simply allowing things happen and in the end, always stands up again firmer and stronger than before.

For that reason, the EZLN has won much more politically than if it had shot thousands of bullets. I believe the EZLN is proposing a new strategy to deal with conflict and this strategy does not correspond to the logic of winning or losing, but to a new logic where it is 'all us' who will win or lose, but it is all us together.

*Q. How is the EZLN struggle related with other levels of political struggle?*

A. The EZLN has gained great strength locally because it has been a mediator promoting dialogue, and because the Zapatistas are answering to people's problems because it has the authority and the capacity to do so. The EZLN has its own initiatives but it also listens to everybody, the same is true for listening to the Inter de Milan soccer team, than to a *priísta* (PRI member or representative), because this is what Zapatismo is all about, dialogue and negotiate with all actors, with the national and international civil societies, but never with the government.

I also believe Zapatismo is a proposal crossing diverse initiatives at the international level, but this re-positioning of Zapatismo is based on the hope that 'we' [society] can create a new model of living at the international level. But this proposal is based first and foremost on the fact that the EZLN has never tried to impose its project upon anybody. It [the EZLN] is simply saying, "This is us, but we cannot tell you what to do in your country, those are your convictions, it is your home, your history, your community, your city. But no matter what you do, you must fight at home." And it leaves this responsibility for you.

*Q. How are the Caracoles different from the Aguascalientes?*

A. The EZLN has gone through three great moments. The first one was the phase of armed struggle, of the entire military preparation and the first twelve days of combat. The second was the stage of dialogue; the Aguascalientes functioned to facilitate the dialogue with different actors but mainly with the national and international civil societies, so the Aguascalientes were spaces for resistance. But resistance and dialogue are limited, so the EZLN entered into a third stage with the Caracoles, a phase in which it is necessary to construct autonomy and the new government.

*Q. In this process of constructing autonomy, how do you see the relationship between the EZLN and the other political forces, particularly with the political parties in Mexico?*

A. In Mexico the political parties have turned politics into business. Politics is a synonym of prostitution. Sixty percent of the electorate is not voting because people do not believe in political parties any more, the political parties have no legitimacy, and so people are looking for new alternatives, or simply trying to hang on to whatever is at hand, this is what is happening in Chiapas now. In Chiapas, more and more people are going to the JBG to resolve their problems, and the Zapatistas are listening to everybody, they are supporting Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas. The EZLN is not doing this because it thinks it is the best [option], but because it is the people that now see the Zapatistas as a moral authority, they see them as a legitimate authority and an option to the political prostitution of the mainstream parties.

*Q. In your opinion, what has been the input of the JBG in improving the life conditions in the Zapatista communities?*

A. The EZLN chose to reject the support of the government because the indigenous communities have dignity. And even though they have received a lot of national and international support, the EZLN wants to be fully independent. They [the Zapatistas] are working to create their own initiatives, for example, with the coffee trade. They say, “Look, when you come to Chiapas, you don't need to bring us money, if you want to help us, buy our coffee at a fair price, and this way you support our struggle.” And the same can be said for health, education, cooperatives, and so on.

In ten years of this war, the Zapatistas have built more than 50 autonomous schools, whereas the government has been taking away the subsidies for education. Likewise, in ten years, the government has not been able to build many clinics while you have 40 clinics functioning in the Zapatista territory. They have international doctors practicing surgeries in these facilities, in Oventic, in Morelia, in La Garrucha. And it works the same with trade of Zapatista merchandise; all the products are sold as a symbol of their struggle and resistance.

*Q. The first anniversary of the Caracoles is near [August 9, 2004], in your opinion where is the EZLN today, and where will it go in the future?*

A. First, I would make a positive evaluation of what has happened because now people have a regular channel for dialogue and communication. But on the other hand, I also believe that it is time that the EZLN enters or moves into other spheres of people's lives and into the life of the communities. This is a good moment to systematize and to share

experiences, but the EZLN cannot not achieve this goal if the Juntas do not mature, the Juntas need to grow, and it may be necessary to reorganize them. This is a great challenge for the Juntas, but I believe they must face this challenge while on the road, in other words, if in the future the Juntas cease to work, or if they have already ceased working now, then it will be necessary to create other structures, and if this new structures work, then very good! But if the new structures do not work, then the EZLN cannot stay still, it will have to advance and continue to respond to the needs of the communities.

**Andrés Aubry, San Cristóbal de las Casas, June 2004.**

*Historian, and one of the EZLN's advisors during the San Andres Talks in 1996. He passed away in September 2007.*

### **The San Andres Agreements**

We discussed several concepts of autonomy and territory during the talks, but then the greatest convincing power of the Zapatistas was their great diplomatic capacity for negotiation, and their ability to find a common ground. During the discussions, there was a wide range of representatives from Oaxaca, mostly Zapoteco and Mixteco indigenous, who had a very communalist sense of autonomy and community. There was also a proposal to include an idea of regional autonomy in the Agreements; the idea was something similar to what they have in states, such as Guerrero or Michoacán. However, the EZLN argued that the question of autonomy should be discussed later, once the government had agreed to peace and the end of the conflict.

At the time, the government representatives did not want to hear the word 'region' during the negotiations, they were afraid of recognizing other levels of government in addition to the federal, state, and municipal levels; they were trying to avoid any drastic

reforms to the Constitution. Therefore, the advisers and the EZLN had to think of a concept of autonomy suitable to all, and at the same time, conceive a coordination strategy that was feasible within Constitutional law.

And then, one night, we find an artifice that allowed us to recognize and to create a ‘region’ but without having to pronounce the word, and this artifice consisted of the recognition of the collective rights that are already acknowledged in the Constitution. The right of the municipalities to associate among themselves and to coordinate development efforts (Art.115). And the proposal was approved! The idea of recognizing collective rights matches the logic of the Agreements, because on the one hand, this recognizes the culture and the rights of indigenous peoples. And on the other hand, the agreements recognize the intimate bond between men, land and territory for the indigenous peoples, which was granted by Agreement 169 of the UN.<sup>105</sup>

### **The Aguascalientes**

The Aguascalientes were built for civil society and they were similar to an agora, they functioned to promote intercultural communication and to serve as places to facilitate the encounter between the Zapatista bases of support, the rebels, and the militia, but fundamentally they were places to practice resistance and promote intercultural communication. The first space of this type was the National Democratic Convention (CND). And to some extent, the Aguascalientes were spaces in which the Zapatistas sought to fulfill their ideal of “A world in which many worlds can fit.”

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<sup>105</sup> The interviewed is refereeing to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, which establishes the norms, rights and guarantees for the recognition and respect of the collective rights of the indigenous and tribal peoples in the independent countries. It was ratified by the Mexican government in 1992.



## The Caracoles

The Caracoles signified an important shift in Zapatista strategy and the most important change they introduced was the incorporation of a notion of territory. The Aguascalientes did not work under territorial bases. However, if we are to speak about a form of government, that government should have a territorial structure; otherwise we would be speaking of floating in the air. If the Aguascalientes functioned as the capitals for encounters, then the Caracoles now function as regional (political) capitals, and even though they do not have identifiable borders, they are still defining the idea of territory, or rather, a territorial base. Each Caracol corresponds to a *pueblo pluri-étnico* (pluri-ethnic people), and in turn, each of these *pueblos* corresponds to a region with a particular territory.<sup>106</sup> For example, the Caracol of La Realidad, is mainly composed of Tojolabales and Tzeltales who have lived in the south of the jungle. The Caracol of Francisco Gómez is located in the heart of the jungle, and composed of *Tzeltaleros*; the Caracol of Roberto Barrios, corresponds to the northern areas and, Oventic, in the Highlands of Chiapas, which is mainly composed of Tzotziles, but also Tzeltales.

In *La Treceava Esquila* (The Thirteen Stele), the Caracoles are still described as agoras, but in practice, the Caracoles were conceived to fulfill the right of these communities and municipalities to associate and coordinate development actions.<sup>107</sup> The autonomy of the Caracoles is legitimate because it is grounded on the fulfillment of the San Andres Agreements.

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<sup>106</sup> Here the notion of '*pueblo(s)*' is referring to the collective nature of the existence of the ethnic groups in Mexico, which historically have gathered together based on culture, language and territory.

<sup>107</sup> In this document, published in 2003, the EZLN 'announced' and described the birth of the Caracoles. I will refer to it later in the chapter.

## **Federalism**

According to *The Thirteen Stele*, the Caracoles are redefining and redistributing powers. The administration of global and inter-territorial affairs among Caracoles corresponds exclusively to the EZLN's CCRI, which is the main political body. The EZLN's General Command is in charge of military affairs, but the territorial structure and local government correspond to the JBG. In other words, the JBGs have no military missions and they have no authority over the insurgent and the militia forces.

The JBGs are the local government, thus, they only have command over the communities on which they are based. More importantly, the JBGs must coordinate development actions among the municipalities, but they do not substitute, nor surpass the authority of the Autonomous Municipalities (MAREZ), which is crucial because the municipalities are 'free' and 'autonomous.' This is the Zapatista version of Federalism. The JBGs are not above the municipalities, just as a constitutional governor is not above the Federation. In sum, the Juntas and the Autonomous Councils, which correspond to the authorities of the municipalities (MAREZs), have different functions and different responsibilities. The feature of separation of powers is not one that belongs to the Zapatistas, it corresponds to the Constitution, and Mexico is a Federal Republic.

The San Andres Agreements speak of the levels of government, and of territorial layers necessary to govern. Territory is a key element for the Zapatistas, who have exhibited a great capacity for negotiation and diplomacy and have been able to include the question of territory in the Agreements without the mention of 'regions', and yet have been able to create them without naming them as such. Today the Caracoles represent a

total and radical fulfillment of the San Andres Agreements. The Caracoles are government structures with a territorial base.

## **Nation**

Zapatismo has not a set outline. The important theme here is that Zapatismo is a movement attempting to construct a project from below. The Zapatistas are attempting to arrive at a set of agreements from below, from a very practical level, and one that can include Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas. Likewise, Zapatismo does not feature a plan or an outline for the nation, but rather, the EZLN proposes a set of key principles as the bases for discussion and dialogue. The only plan of the EZLN is the “Anything for us, everything for all”, yet the EZLN has never attempted to impose any structures or outlines outside of the autonomous municipalities. That is the reason why the EZLN has always expressed reluctance to take power, because power cannot be taken, it must be constructed—power cannot be built or given by decree—power must be constructed, such is what the EZLN’s offers.

## **Ernesto Ledesma, San Cristóbal de las Casas, June 2004**

*Director of Centro de Análisis Político e Investigaciones Sociales y Económicas A.C. (CAPISE). According to its website, CAPISE is a civil association advocated to promote the research, analysis and the defense of the collective rights of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas since 2002. CAPISE is also member and national coordinator in Mexico of the continental network "Convergence of Movements of Peoples of the Americas" (COMPA), which promotes the construction of alternatives to neoliberal globalization.*

*Q. What is the importance of the concept of “territorial rights” in order to understand the current state of the conflict in Chiapas?*

A. If we speak of human rights, of collective rights, political rights, or the right to territory, one way or another, you always get to the same point: the non-fulfillment of the San Andres Agreements and you cannot go further from there. I don't see a way to solve the conflict as long as the government insists on not recognizing a territory where indigenous populations can develop their own institutions, where they can have their own systems of justice, and systems that utilize their languages, and that can be controlled and administrated by them. In other words, we are talking about the necessity to solve this problem both in form and in content.

*Q. In the document 'The prisoner's dilemma', a research done by CAPISE, it is mentioned that there is a difference between a geopolitical reading and a bio-strategic reading, what is the importance of these readings in the analysis of the conflict?*

A. Currently there are a Zapatista Army and the communities in resistance in Chiapas, but there is also a huge operative —one that includes a military, political, economic, social and cultural blockade, and which was launched by the state to control these communities. So what is happening? Again, you arrive to the same point, the San Andres Agreements. But the state is now dealing with the challenge posed by those communities that are saying: “We do not accept this economic model; our natural resources are not for sale.” Now these communities are defending the territory and the wealth of the territory, they are not renting their lands to state-owned enterprises, nor to transnational companies nor to individual entrepreneurs, these communities are not accepting the use of transgenic seeds, they are denying the entrance to the big companies such as Monsanto.

It does not matter who is in charge of the economic model: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the U.S. government, whoever it is, the pressure and the mobilizations of the indigenous peoples will continue. This model of resistance is working like a barrier to defend the strategic resources from the economic model, to block the structural reforms and the privatizations. In sum, the state is dealing with communities that are saying, “No!” And it is the very existence of the same economic model that is unifying the people.

*Q. Can you describe the work of the NGOs in the communities?*

A. We are like sailing ships arriving to a harbor, the harbor are the indigenous communities. What is the lifetime of CAPISE? What is the lifetime of the CDHFBC, of SIPAZ? How long are we going to last as organizations? One year, one month, five, fifteen, twenty months? I do not know. But what I am sure about is that our existence will be shorter than the life and existence of the indigenous communities. They are the harbor, and from this perspective, it does not matter if we (the organizations) are here or not, the communities will continue fighting and resisting. They are now an organic part of the structure of the world, of life, of the political existence, and so, we will and we must continue working with them. Our work with the communities is based on reciprocity and cooperation. We respect the communities' autonomy, so they do recognize our own autonomy as CAPISE, it is a relationship of mutual respect.

*Q. What changes have you seen since the inauguration of the Caracoles?*

A. To a great extent the transition to the Caracoles broke up with part of the clandestine nature of the EZLN. I think about it in the following way: Imagine a house, with a big and immense hall door that remained closed to diverse groups, and suddenly, those who had been left outside, and who never had been able to enter the house, look at the door once again and suddenly realize that the door was open! So, we began to come in, one by one, then in twos, then we began to enter into the different regions, and what did we find? We found a government structure already in place. In other words, we found the San Andres Agreements working right there, in the real world.

Before communities had only the options of federal or state institutions, but suddenly communities have realized that they now have other alternatives for dealing with justice, or for solving agrarian conflicts, land conflicts, and that these alternatives can be equally applied to *priistas*, to the ARIC-Independiente, to *perredistas* (PRD members or representatives), *panistas* (PAN members or representatives), and even to the state and the federal government. And on the other hand, the JBGs have already locked up to themselves, because the Zapatistas chose to call them “GOOD GOVERNMENT”, so now Zapatistas are obliged to fulfill that promise to the people, they are obligated to govern as a GOOD GOVERNMENT, and on this point there is not turning back.

### **Bienvenidos a territorio zapatista<sup>108</sup>**

As in other stages in which the EZLN has placed ideas into motion, the birth of the Zapatista Caracoles were preceded by a written narrative: *The Thirteen Stele*, a document

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<sup>108</sup> The phrase, translated to English as ‘Welcome to Zapatista territory’, was written on a road sign in the highway to Oventic.

released in six parts in July 2003. This document can be read both as a political and a spatial manifesto in which the Zapatistas announced the next step in the process of imagining and naming spaces where to fulfill the demand of respect for the dignity of the indigenous peoples. In *The Thirteen Stele*, the EZLN is assigning cultural and political meanings to a geography they have been creating through years of struggle:

Because you must know, my blue repose, that these indigenous [peoples] become angry even with those who sympathize with their cause. And the fact is that they do not obey. When they are expected to speak, they are silent. When silence is expected, they speak. When they are expected to move forward, they go back. When they are expected to keep going back, they're off on another side. When it's expected that they just speak, they break out talking of other things. When they're expected to be satisfied with their geography, they walk the world and its struggles. Or it's that they're not content with anyone. And it doesn't seem to matter to them much. What does matter to them is for their heart to be content, and so they follow the paths shown by their heart. (*The Thirteen Stele*. Part One: A Conch)

In this narrative, the Aguascalientes and the Caracoles are described as spaces expressing ideas of resistance and dignity. The Aguascalientes, they say, are spaces the Zapatistas 'agreed' to build for promoting resistance and to engage in a dialogue with the civil society. In the same way, the Caracoles are symbolically described like 'doors' for the people and the indigenous communities to 'get in' and 'out' of this Zapatista geography:

So, the "Caracoles" will be like doors for going into the communities and for the communities to leave. Like windows for seeing us and for us to look out. Like speakers for taking our word far, and for listening to what is far away. But, most especially, for reminding us that we should stay awake and be alert to the rightness of the worlds, which people the world. (*The Thirteen Stele*. Part Three: A Name)

The *Thirteen Stele* also conveys other important symbols that are giving a sense of movement and change to this geographical narrative. First, a sense of movement connecting both spaces Aguascalientes and Caracoles into a life cycle of death and birth, and at the same, a sense of spatial transformation: the Caracoles were ‘born’ out of the symbolic ‘death’ of Aguascalientes (declared on August 8, 2003). So the Caracoles are not ‘new’ but rather transformed spaces with a different content. Second, the shape of the caracol (a sea snail shell) symbolizing the different (spatial) layers of the Zapatista struggle, from the outside in: the international, the national, the regional, the local levels, and at the center of the shell, the EZLN and *El Votán* (the Guardian and Heart of the Zapatista peoples). And third, the *Thirteen Stele* includes the indigenous names and the meanings that the Zapatista communities have given to this geography:

*Madre de los Caracoles del Mar de Nuestros Sueños* (Mother of the Caracoles of the Sea of Our Dreams) or S NAN XOCH BAJ PAMAN JA TEZ WAYCHIMEL KU'UNTIC, for the Caracol of **La Realidad**, of Tojolabal, Tzeltal and Mame Zapatistas.

*Torbellino de Nuestras Palabras* (Whirlwind of Our Words) or MUC'UL PUY ZUTU'IK JU'UN JC'OPTIC, for the Caracol of **Morelia**, of Tzeltal, Tzotzil and Tojolabal Zapatistas.

*Resistencia Hacia un Nuevo Amanecer* (Resistance for a New Dawn) or TE PUY TAS MALIYEL YAS PAS YACH'IL SACAL QUINAL, for the Caracol of **La Garrucha**, of Tzeltal Zapatistas.

*El Caracol Que Habla Para Todos* (The Caracol Which Speaks For All) or TE PUY YAX SCO'PJ YU'UN PISILTIC (in Tzeltal), and PUY MUITIT'AN CHA 'AN TI LAK PEJTEL (in Chol), for the Caracol of **Roberto Barrios**, of Chol, Zoque and Tzeltal Zapatistas.

*Resistencia y Rebeldía Por la Humanidad* (Resistance and Rebellion for Humanity) or TA TZIKEL VOCOLIL XCHIUC JTOYBAILTIC SVENTA SLEKILAL SJUNUL BALUMIL, for the Caracol of **Oventic**, of Tzotziles and Tzeltales Zapatistas.



The Caracoles were inaugurated on August 9, 2003. They were created to be the seats of the Good Government *Juntas*. Respectively, the *Juntas* are to observe that in the Zapatista territory the government respect and govern for the indigenous people and the well being of the communities (the Zapatista ‘command by obeying’). The structure of the Good government is spatially organized in various (territorial) levels articulating communities, regions and rebel zones that overlapped with the limits of one or more state municipalities. A zone corresponds to a group of regions, the autonomous municipalities form regions, and the municipalities are integrated by a group of communities.<sup>109</sup> And the *Juntas* are structured as follows. There is one Junta corresponding to each rebel zone (five in total), and each Junta is in turn integrated by one or two delegates from the Councils of the Autonomous Municipalities in a given zone. So the *Juntas* are not above the authority of the Councils, rather they function as complementary government structures meant to help coordinate resistance and building up autonomy based on a separation of powers and its articulation on a regional level.

In this course of reorganizing, the MAREZ remain in charge of building the material conditions for resistance, and function through several commissions in accordance to the each of the EZLN’s demands: health, education, land, work, housing and food, culture and information, justice administration, etc. And correspondingly, the *Juntas* coordinate a series of administrative responsibilities, and at the same time are the main bridge between the indigenous communities and the society. These responsibilities include: counteracting the imbalanced development in the MAREZ and the communities;

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<sup>109</sup> For instance, the Tzots Choj Good Government Junta, includes the Autonomous Municipalities of "17 de Noviembre," "Primero de Enero," "Ernesto Che' Guevara," "Olga Isabel," "Lucio Cabañas," "Miguel Hidalgo" and "Vicente Guerrero". These Zapatista municipalities are in turn “encompassed” with part of the territory of the state municipalities of Ocosingo, Altamirano, Chanal, Oxchuc, Huixta'n, Chilo'n, Teopisca, and Amatenango del Valle. See *The Thirteen Stele*. Part Three: A name.

mediating internal conflicts between the MAREZ, and with the government municipalities; the supervision of projects and community work in the MAREZ; to work and guide national and international civil society in their visits; to carry out productive projects; set up peace camps; to carry out research that may ‘provide benefits for the communities,’ and to coordinate any other activity permitted in the rebel communities. The CCRI in each region is in charge of supervising the work of the *Juntas*, but the communities elect the members of the *Juntas*.<sup>110</sup>

### **Caracoles in motion**

1.

As any of other EZLN’s major public events, the inauguration of the “Centro de Capacitación de Promotores Culturales Compañero Manuel”, was organized as a big collective celebration. The school was opened a few days before the first anniversary of the Caracoles in August 2004. The center is located in La Culebra, a Tzeltal community of the MAREZ Ricardo Flores Magón, in the Montes Azules region. The school is a training center for those assigned as ‘cultural promoters’, young indigenous who are trained to be basic and secondary school teachers in the Zapatista communities. The school belongs to the so-called Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Education System.

In the summer of 2004, I traveled to La Culebra to observe the celebration. It took me two days to get there from San Cristóbal because the distances are long and the public transportation to Montes Azules is limited. I arrived at the place in the afternoon shortly after the inaugural speech. I was received by the Comité de Recepción (Reception

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<sup>110</sup> See *The Thirteen Stele*. Part Six: A Good Government.

Committee) and registered in the book of the civil society visitors. The place was full of people, indigenous Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas, *oenegeneros* (activists), members of civil society, and journalists.

Some celebration events took place; the first of them was an open class with the indigenous teachers and the students showing the classrooms and the educational system to the visitors. Later on, a discussion was organized in the library, different education collectives were present and they held a conversation around the idea of the ‘educación verdadera’ (true education), a concept that integrates pedagogical strategies and the political collective experience in order to develop a practical vision of education and knowledge. Afterwards, a basketball game between Zapatistas and the team of civil society took place. ‘Our’ team (Civil Society) lost the game.

Late in the afternoon, and after all of us had been invited to eat beef and *tortillas*, the municipal authorities of Flores Magón started the commencement ceremony: “Thanks to all of you to have come to this distant place. We know that the trip is difficult, and so we thank you all for having come to see this work.” The Zapatista representatives handed out diplomas to the first cohort of promoters, 36 teenaged boys and girls. The celebration continued all day long, and it ended at night with a *baile*. As the dance came to its conclusion, a voice announced over the speakers, “all visitors should leave La Culebra now.”

The Centro de Capacitación is the result of the campaign “Una escuela para Chiapas” (A School for Chiapas), a project of the Greek Collective “Solidarity with Chiapas”. According to information later published in the newspaper *La Jornada* (GRECIA CHIAPAS, “Breve bitácora de una escuela en la selva”, 2004), the funding for

the project (130, 000 Euros) came from people's donations put together in neighborhoods of Athens and other Greek cities in which bazaars, concerts, theater presentations, projections of documentaries and debates about the Zapatista struggle took place. The school complex is characterized by the hexagonal style of the buildings, and it includes 1, 390 sq. meters of classrooms, bedrooms, library, bathrooms and showers, dining room, kitchen and a basketball court, public and community buildings.

In another article, the Collective utilized the concept of *heterotopia* to summarize the idea of the project. According to them, *heterotopias* can be understood as thresholds, transition spaces or locus where life would be different and where people have the power of defining 'the different' in a tangible way. The Centro de Capacitación is thus described as a 'heterotopia of dignity', that is a transition space where new social experiences are happening (GRECIA CHIAPAS, "En las huellas de una heterotopia", 2004).

## 2.

The Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Education System of National Liberation of the Highlands of Chiapas (SERAZLN-ZACH), is another of the large and long-term projects put together in collaboration with and through the economic support and solidarity of national and international civil society. According to SERAZLN's website ([www.serazln-altos.org](http://www.serazln-altos.org)), the system is intended to develop an autonomous education for the indigenous people in the Highlands based on the idea of 'consciousness-raising' education:

To educate is to learn, which is to say, “to educate by learning.” We can educate students –who educate us- so that those of us who are in favor of life can educate each other mutually and so construct those many worlds of which we all dream. We can say that we know how to educate those who educate us, that is why our school is for the entire world and is why we say “for everyone everything, nothing for us.” This is the form of the autonomy of our people, of our culture, and in this way, we can recreate the different languages that have never existed for those who dominate, while our faces have been denied for being the color of earth. Traditional education, as it has been up till now, has not understood that it can be synthesized in one word, which is REALITY or CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING.

The system is composed of three schools in the Highlands: the Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Primary School (EPRAZ), the Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Secondary School (ESRAZ), and the Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Spanish and Maya Languages (CELMRAZ). The ESRAZ is located in the Caracol of Oventic, and it is the oldest and so far the most advanced of the education projects developed in the rebel territories.<sup>111</sup> One of the ESRAZ’ coordinators, a graduate from ESRAZ who has been in the position for two years now, explained in more detailed the internal organization of the school.<sup>112</sup> The school operates as a boarding school, it has three coordinators—all of them are indigenous, two women and one men.

They coordinate 28 promoters who teach 110 indigenous students from the Autonomous Municipalities belonging to the JBG in Oventic. Currently the 80 percent of the students are men, “It is still harder for women to attend school and to study”, he comments, because “the majority of them do not speak Spanish, and besides because most of the women should work in their communities.” The idea of an autonomous education, as the coordinator continues, is to provide a political education for the indigenous people: “Our education (system) is autonomous because it is not provided by

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<sup>111</sup> The Zapatistas in Oventic informally mentioned that the construction of the library and the classrooms buildings started during the time of the Aguascalientes.

<sup>112</sup> Caracol of Oventic, Chiapas, Fieldwork notes, July 2004.

the government. We do not ask permission to the Bad government anymore, we are doing what the people have commanded us to do: “to command by obeying.”

Discipline and rigid schedules are at the bases of this political education, he says, and gives an example of what is a regular school weekday for the students: 7 o'clock in the morning: breakfast is fixed by the students. 8:00 AM: first period of classes. 11:00 AM: a 30-minutes recess. 11:30 to 3:30 PM: second period of classes. 3:30 PM: second recess. 4:00 to 7:00 PM: evening classes. These are devoted to free-time activities such as sports and/or or to attend the courses and activities offered by the ‘internationals’ (visitors and activist). 8:00 PM: the students fix dinner. Classes are Monday to Friday, and on weekends, the majority of the students return to their communities. Those who live in distant communities stay here all the time, or they return to their communities one or twice a month. I had the opportunity to observe some of the projects approved by the Juntas to be part of these free-time activities: a Mexican college student presented a project for garbage recycling, a group of French teenagers and two adult instructors were approved to teach Yoga classes; two North Americans, to teach *capoeira* classes; a college student from Spain taught a theater workshop, and another high school teacher, also from Spain, stayed to teach astronomic observation and basic mathematics to the children.<sup>113</sup>

During another conversation, one of the CELMRAZ promoters explained to me the general concept of the Language Center. CELMRAZ is collectively integrated by six people—none of them is indigenous. The promoters teach Tzotzil and Spanish classes. The project of teaching Tzotzil and Spanish languages for Mexicans and foreigners who

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<sup>113</sup> In my opinion, none of the projects worked as expected, I observed the students losing the interest very quickly in every time.

come here to Oventic, she says, comes out of the fact that the collective thoroughly shares the goals of the Zapatista political education, and therefore, the promoters understand the teaching of languages as a means of cultural exchange and of creating and raising the awareness about the Zapatista situation: “We want people to have more information about what is happening here, and also to be able to share their experiences with the people here.”<sup>114</sup> The project is very importantly based on the idea of ‘reciprocity’, she continues, fees are not to make profit but based on the principle of ‘fairness’: people pay a recovery fee or donation equivalent to three or four (daily) minimum wage salaries in the student’s country of residence.<sup>115</sup> Finally, she commented that for the time being, the CELMRAZ in Oventic is the only languages school in rebel territories, and that they are looking to expand the project to other Caracoles in the near future.

### 3.

The “Clínica Guadalupana” is a state-of-the-art autonomous health project in the Rebel Territory. The clinic is located in the Caracol of Oventic and offers daily consultations for dental, laboratory, pharmacy, emergencies, traditional medicine, ophthalmology, gynecology and birth control, general medicine. It is open seven days a week, and includes its own surgery and recovery room, nurse station, beds, stretchers and wheel chairs. According to the clinic coordinator, who briefly spoke to me about the project, all

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<sup>114</sup> Caracol of Oventic, Chiapas, Fieldwork notes, July 2004.

<sup>115</sup> Fees are more detailed in the CELMRAZ’s website. For Spanish classes: the equivalent of three days of work; and four days for Tzotzil classes. The amount covers 15 hours of classes (three hours a day for five days), and the meals. Lodging is offered without charge. “To facilitate the donation process, we ask that the donation be given in Mexican pesos or U.S. cash dollars. The money is given directly to the authorities in charge of collecting donations in Caracol II.” See [www.serazln-altos.org/eng/celm.html](http://www.serazln-altos.org/eng/celm.html).

offered services are free and available to everyone: Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas. He calculates an average of 150 consultations a month.<sup>116</sup>

As the education project, the clinic works with young indigenous promoters, who receive medical training from national and international doctors for periods of five to six months before they are ready to return and work in their communities. The clinic has dormitories for the promoters and for the patients who need to stay in the Caracol for treatment or laboratory results. There were 20 bilingual promoters then—all them were women. One of them, a Tzotzil teenager told me: “I did not decide to become a promoter, it was my community that chose me.” She lives in a near community and travels back and forth once a week.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Caracol of Oventic, Chiapas, Fieldwork notes, July 2004.

<sup>117</sup> Caracol of Oventic, Chiapas, Fieldwork notes, July 2004.



## CHAPTER SEVEN THE STRATEGY OF THE CARACOL

Porque has de saber, azul reposo, que estos indígenas enojan hasta a quienes simpatizan con su causa. Y es que no obedecen. Cuando se espera que hablen, callan. Cuando se espera su silencio, hablan. Cuando se espera que dirijan, se ponen atrás. Cuando se espera que sigan atrás, agarran para otro lado. Cuando se espera que solo hablen ellos, se arrancan hablando de otras cosas. Cuando se espera que se conformen con su geografía, caminan el mundo y sus luchas. —EZLN. *The Thirteen Stele, Part one*, 2003.<sup>118</sup>

### Entrada y Salida

In some of the Caracoles the entrance and exit points are clearly indicated with a wood sign: ‘entrada y salida’ (enter/exit). These physical signs are there to guide and control the access of all visitors whether they be Zapatistas or non-Zapatistas, indigenous or non-indigenous, nationals or foreigners, volunteers, activists or journalists, or anyone interested in knowing the work of the Good Government Juntas, or to collaborate with the Zapatistas in building indigenous autonomy in the rebel territories. Yet, these signs could be seen as symbolic ‘doorways’ as well. The experience of getting ‘in’ and ‘out’ of the Caracoles and the Zapatista territory is more than just physically entering or leaving

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<sup>118</sup> But you must know you blue serenity, these indigenous may angry even to who sympathized with them. And they do so because they do not obey. If expected to talk, they remain silent. If expected to silent, they talk. If expected to lead, they lie behind. If expected to remain back, they take any other direction. If expected to speak solely about themselves, they made people mad speaking of anything else. If expected they yield their geography, they walk the world and its struggles.

the Highlands and the Lacandona Jungle in Chiapas. It is a challenge to trespass these doorways and be able to ‘look’ closer at the workings of the Rebel Territory through different ‘layers’ —of language, race, ethnicity, gender, age, culture, class, time and space— each of them adding specific meanings to the Zapatista broader demand of constructing a ‘space of dignity’ for all human beings.

As I intended to illustrate in the preceding chapter, the Zapatista communities are a key chain in the machinery providing the Rebel Territory with practical meanings of space, dignity, autonomy and resistance. For now the priority for the communities is to becoming more independent from external economic support, to carry out the main autonomous projects (education, health and commercialization), and for Good Government to assure that money, resources, and projects can be equally distributed among the Caracoles and the MAREZ. However, as was also described in the chapter, the building of autonomy depends on the work of the indigenous communities as much as on their relationship with the civil societies (looking here through the eyes of the ‘accompaniment’ process). The construction of this relationship has been a long-term process too, and as I will discuss next, the perspectives presented on this relationship are shedding a light on how the making of the Rebel Territory (and of the entire Zapatista geography) is embracing a holistic and organic idea of social transformation involving, as one of the interviewees pointed out, ‘strategic acts’, in this case, acts for the collective survival of the indigenous peoples.

Among these perspectives, the referred notion of ‘strategic acts’ introduces the most general and compelling level to thinking on the different phases of the Zapatista struggle (armed struggle, civil and peaceful resistance, and the construction of autonomy

and government) as a possibility of creating a ‘new model of living’. Yet this general level (suggesting a specific sense of the social transformation that is pursued by the EZLN) can be unfolded into four major dimensions relating social struggle, autonomy and resistance as the practical means to construct such possibility for the indigenous peoples. First, social struggle is a long-term process of creating alternatives, resources and solutions that are seen as necessary to create a ‘new model of living’. This process of creation is in turn referring to a sense of totality (and a ‘fullness of living’) constructed through basic relationships — between the individual and the social, the qualitative and the quantitative, the particular and the global, the means and the ends of struggle, and so on. Second, the possibility of creating a ‘new model of living’ is not an abstract condition but a material process in which alternatives, resources and solutions must be constructed as to be achievable within concrete temporal and geographical circumstances. In this holistic vision the notions of space and time are re-signified as producers or active dimensions for social transformation.

Third, autonomy and resistance are connected as material practices and symbols providing meaning to social struggle and to the possibility of creating the revolutionary subject that could be responsible for creating the alternatives, the resources and the solutions that are necessary to construct the ‘new model of living’. This model of living has one of its utmost priorities that of making possible the Rebel Territory be ‘independent’ from the relations of domination exerted by the state upon the indigenous peoples. In addition, the creation of the revolutionary subject guarantees a fundamental sense of collectiveness and continuity for social struggle (historical but also generational).

And last of all, the creation of new meanings and values (e.g. reciprocity, solidarity, cooperation, respect, collective work, community and collectiveness) is equally important in giving sense to autonomy and resistance as a means for social struggle and therefore for the creation of the revolutionary subject. Plus, the new meanings and values (that in turn are filled up in a practical way by means of autonomy and resistance) are providing a very important cultural dimension to the process of constructing alternatives, resources and solutions. In this dimension, dignity can be re-signified as a value to make indigenous identity politically stronger for the defense of the rights and means of subsistence that give the indigenous peoples both a cultural and material sense of collectiveness and historical survival.

In the same way, the former ideas are suggestive for eventually re-elaborating the notion of a ‘space of dignity’ on a theoretical level but within the specificity of the Zapatista struggle —that is as a historical, geographical and culturally grounded demand for social transformation, a task that will be the central matter in the next and concluding chapter. As I will discuss in the conclusions, a more detailed analysis shows that the possibilities to fulfill the EZLN’s demand for a ‘space of dignity’ are different in each of the previous dimensions, and furthermore, that these possibilities might be limited as a means to carry out a major transformation in Mexico. With this aim, it is important to outline some preliminary ideas.

First of all, in the perspectives presented on the accompaniment process the shared idea about the necessity of creating a ‘new model of living’ can be connected on an abstract level with the possibility to think of a ‘space of dignity’ as a multilayered process of creating (new) spaces, but also the cultural meanings, the subjects, and the

material relationships that are seen as necessary to guarantee the survival of the indigenous peoples within concrete historical circumstances. From this perspective, Caracoles and Good Government *Juntas* exist as alternative structures of government with a concrete territorial definition articulating communities, regions and rebel zones. In current stage of Good Government, the incorporation of the territorial dimension is in turn crucial for a practical definition of the notion of dignity (a definition primarily connected with the defense of indigenous autonomy before the neoliberal state).

This territorial sense of the Zapatista notion of dignity is likewise pointing not to 'new' spatial forms that are to be created, but to the possibility of reasserting existent forms recognized in the Constitutional law, and specifically the affirmation of the municipality as a level of government (and already contemplates the right to association of the municipalities to coordinate actions of development on a regional scale). In short, at this general level, the Zapatista demand of dignity is basically appealing to the very legal (and moral) basis of the Mexican state: to respect the Constitution, as well as the international conventions signed by the Mexican government (the ILO Convention 169) which also recognizes the right to territory for the indigenous peoples.

In the same light, as Andres Aubry suggested, in the Zapatista's ideal for social transformation, power cannot be taken; power must be constructed 'from below', that is by the people and for the people. In this scheme the opposition made between 'below' and 'above' is hence paying attention to another dimension of the Zapatista notion of dignity: the necessity of constructing power by obeying the command of the Constitutional law, but also to the moral duty of government to exercise authority by respecting the people's sovereignty.

In the Rebel Territory the construction of power is in practice placing the Good Government in a role of being a political mediator negotiating and dialoging with the other local political forces at the local scale (EZLN's political adversaries included). The implications of this new role for the Zapatistas shall be analyzed beyond its effectiveness as a strategy to gain political strength, and in conjunction with the impact of having 'opened' the entrances to the Rebel Territory to these political forces.

Plus, the construction of Good Government as a 'pluri-ethnic' government adds another important element. Even though the Good Government is based on the idea of respect the dignity of the indigenous peoples (in this case by respecting their forms of cultural —political— identity), the organization of different *pueblos indígenas* (ethnic peoples) into a territorial structure (articulating regions, zones and municipalities) is combined with the current geographical conditions in the Rebel Territory as a source of spatial difference (as it has been recognized by the EZLN itself when accounting the unbalanced development of autonomy in the Rebel territory). Furthermore, so far the Constitution acknowledges the pluri-ethnic nature of the nation based on the existence of the indigenous peoples, but it does not recognize this pluri-ethnic nature as a basis for government.

At this time, the construction of the Caracoles and Juntas as government structures with a territorial base is additionally facing a transitional stage in which the political structure of the Rebel territory needs to be completely separated from the EZLN's military structure, a process that is being attempted on the Republican notion of federalism and the division of power (see figure 5). And this major transition creates additional concerns, for instance, to what extent this division of power might lead to a

centralization of power in the Rebel territory? To what extent this centralization can be another source of spatial differentiation? Or, to what extent can this government structure be attached to larger existent institutions such as the *ejido* assemblies, the indigenous customary ways of government, and even with the religious institutions in the indigenous communities?

Last but not least, the building of autonomy is a political process as much as a learning and creative process. For the Zapatista communities, the construction of the Good Government implies a long-term learning in which the members of the different *Juntas* must be constantly rotated, but to a large extent it involves reorganizing pre-existent structures of cooperation and work. However, for the civil societies, the experience of ‘accompanying’ the Zapatistas in the making of the Good Government is completely new and even confusing. For instance, the rotating work style of the Good Government makes the civil societies’ work in the communities less effectively coordinated and slower. In this learning process the Zapatistas have made clear that through the years, this accompaniment relationship has required, and will continue to require, a better organization and coordination. And on the other hand, the contribution of the civil society to this process must be seen not only in regards to the work and political support, but also in terms of the active role civil society has had in recounting the experience of the Zapatista struggle from the inside out, and in promoting the discussion of ideas that have helped us to better understand the nature of their struggle.

**Fig. 5 Structures of government and territorial layers in the Rebel Territory**

CCRI-CG	EZLN	MAREZ	Good Government Juntas	Caracoles
Military command	Military command	No military command	No military command	No military command
Political command	No government attributes	Government attributes (Autonomous Councils)	Government attributes (local government)	Seats of government
No Spatial attributes	Spatial attributes (zones, regions, communities)	Spatial attributes (municipalities)	Spatial attributes (regional scale)	Spatial attributes (inter-regional)

(Based on author's interviews, and on *The Thirteen Stele*)



## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CONCEPTUALIZING A SPACE OF DIGNITY**

#### **Introduction**

Since 1994, a series of new political, cultural and economic spaces have been built in Mexico by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN): starting with the Aguascalientes of Guadalupe Tepeyac, a space built in the Lacandona jungle by Zapatista bases of support in order to hold the first major encounter between the indigenous army and national civil society. Then came the declaration of a the Zapatista Rebel Territory and its Rebel Municipalities —spaces for economic and political resistance ‘overlapping’ with one-third of the state municipalities in Chiapas. Next came the construction of five new Aguascalientes to host the first major encounter between Zapatistas and international civil society. Finally, the inauguration of five Zapatista Caracoles, located in La Realidad, Oventic, Roberto Barrios, Morelia, and Francisco Gómez in the Highlands and in the Lacandona jungle regions. Such spaces have been functioning as the home of the Good Government, which was inaugurated in 2003 during the latest stage of the Zapatistas in their struggle against the Mexican state.

These spaces are articulated both as symbols of and as the material basis for sustaining the long-term resistance launched by the Zapatista Army on January 1st, 1994 in order to gain access to dignified work, land, housing, food, healthcare, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace for all the people of Mexico. Originally, these demands were claimed by force through an armed confrontation with the federal armed forces, but the struggle shifted early on towards a civil, peaceful political resistance, involving major support from the national and international civil society. In the process, the transition from armed to civil and peaceful resistance proved crucial for the political development of the EZLN and for gaining the needed legitimacy as a recognizable political struggle seeking the radical transformation of the country.

Furthermore, this shift has resulted in a differential utilization of material, symbolic and representational dimensions of space as a means to mobilize resistance (from local to global scales) in support of the Zapatista struggle. Fundamentally, this process has resulted in the production of new spaces, which are expressions of the ideas of what I consider to be the EZLN's ultimate and most ambitious demand for social transformation: the construction of a 'space of dignity' for all human beings.

The demand for a 'space of dignity' evolved from the eleven original demands made by the EZLN and from the initial class oriented statements made by the Zapatistas in regard to the necessity of overcoming the state subordination, exploitation, and dispossession of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. The Zapatistas have proposed that political and cultural reflection on a large-scale is necessary in order to understand what the role of the state has been in promoting neoliberalism as a global project that annihilates people's dignity. Work, land, housing, food, healthcare, education,

independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace are seen by the Zapatistas as the necessary conditions for human beings to live with dignity, and it is in this specific context of contemporary national and international resistance to state power and neoliberal globalization that the Zapatista demands must be situated.<sup>119</sup>

During the first decade of the conflict between the EZLN and the Mexican state, different abstract meanings and practices have been fleshed out around the notion of a 'space of dignity', and I have attempted to follow them within the context of three of the major stages in the EZLN's political practice: the Declarations of the Lacandona Jungle, the breaking of the military blockade, and the declaration of the MAREZ, and through the most recent transition of separating the Zapatista Army and the fully military logic from the Zapatista Good Government in reorganizing resistance in the rebel territory. The goal of the EZLN at this point is the political re-structuring of its bases of support throughout the more than one thousand indigenous communities, in order to sustain indigenous autonomy and strengthen the MAREZ, Caracoles and the Juntas, as well as the Good Government's role as a civil entity.

Yet, none of these meanings and practices can be bound together into a single concept of what constitutes a 'space of dignity', but rather they can be used as an open framework, a set of relationships between space, dignity and resistance that should be examined in the light of the major dimensions defining the nature of the transformation that the Zapatista rebellion seeks to obtain. On the one hand, the EZLN in its role as an indigenous national liberation movement to gain access to work, land, housing, food, healthcare, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace for all the

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<sup>119</sup> For comparative analysis of social movements see Alvarez, 1998; Yashar, 1998; Li, 2000; Edelman, 2001.

people of Mexico. On the other hand, the EZLN is also a resistance movement against neoliberal globalization. From this broader perspective, there are three general derivative ideas that I want to use in order to elaborate on how a ‘space of dignity’ can be conceptually defined, how it can be socially produced, and how it can become a means for social transformation. I consider these to be the major theoretical concerns we must understand in order to examine the nature of the Zapatista rebellion and its contribution to the elaboration of possibilities for using space as a means for revolution.

Firstly, the idea in which space and dignity can be knitted together by means of using civil and peaceful resistance in order to demand that the Mexican state fulfills the demands of indigenous peoples. This basic sense of defending what is necessary to live with dignity can be symbolically connected to, for example, the Zapatista slogan of *Everything for everyone, nothing for us*, a phrase which is meant to point out the impossibility of resolving the conflict in Chiapas without resolving, at a national level, all of the eleven Zapatista demands. Secondly, the idea of connecting space and dignity to the demand that the government respect the Constitution, and the indigenous peoples as members of the nation (as respect for the indigenous peoples’ rights in regards to the material basis for their political, economic and cultural reproduction). Here the EZLN’s appeals to the legal bases for regulating the relationship between the government and the governed. And finally, the third and more general idea is that of space and dignity as connected for the possibility of using civil and peaceful resistance to oppose neoliberal globalization. A goal in turn reflected in the slogan of *Another world is possible*, coined during the *Intergaláctico* as a symbol of resistance against neoliberal globalization, which in this context is represented as a total war on people’s dignity.

Therefore, it can be argued that the emancipatory content embedded in these notions of knitting together space, dignity and resistance is complementary to the very basic suggestion about the emancipatory possibilities of space. In this instance, social transformation is not tied to armed revolution, or to the seizing of state power but rather, to the demand that the state to fulfill its responsibility in providing what is necessary for a dignified life. As I will next argue, the Zapatista rebellion has resulted in the re-signification of the notion of dignity, both as a political, and geographical framework from which to think and demand respect. Moreover, the Zapatistas are claiming respect to the very existing legal bases to regulate the relationship between the government and the governed. The EZLN' has also maintained the primary goal of defending the indigenous people's political and territorial structures as the base for its social reproduction. From this general perspective, my approach to the Zapatista struggle is intended to shed a light not only on the resulting relationships between space, dignity, and resistance, but to look further into the meaning of these concepts and relationships and what these might mean within the larger context of the production of space in capitalism.

### **Pointing at the star: Knitting together space and dignity**

Henri Lefebvre (1963) wrote about the politics of space upon reflecting on a universal capitalist logic in which space is produced and organized according to society, mode of production and historical period. He proposed a distinction between, on the one hand, 'space of homogeneity –that is, space at its most general (spatial) level as it is organized by the state– and on the other hand, more concrete levels, such as urban space, or people's dwellings. According to Lefebvre, it is at this spatial level where the members of

society are capable of resisting the spatial homogeneity produced by capital. In order to resist, the members of society must make use of the imagination to create different spatial orders. The aim of my analysis of the conflict between the EZLN and the Mexican state has not been to make a direct translation of Lefebvre's arguments, but, as I have pointed out, to use the notion of a 'space of dignity' as an abstract framework to reflect on the possibilities of relating space and dignity as the basis to organize resistance and eventually, for thinking of, and using space, as a means for revolutionary transformation.

At this level of abstraction, the notion of a 'space of dignity' might initially be thought of in opposition to the spaces of homogeneity, i.e. as a possibility of using space to resist the dominant logic of the production of space. Within this abstract notion, dignity can be re-signified and opposed to the logic of capital as a referent for collective struggle. As in the case of the Zapatista rebellion, dignity can be used to question the universal moral meaning of an individual's human dignity, but the notion of dignity can also be articulated as a means of defending a set of social, political, and cultural rights and material practices from the state. Thus, these rights and practices can be seen as necessary for the collective wellbeing and more importantly, for regulating the relationships between society and the state.

However, the possibilities of connecting this notion of dignity to space, and eventually contesting the dominant spatial order are in any case –and returning to Lefebvre's initial argument– determined by society, the mode of production and the historical period. Hence, the possibilities of conceptualizing a 'space of dignity' must focus on the larger context posed by the relationship between the indigenous peoples and a Mexican state that favors neoliberal globalization.

In this regard, different approaches and authors have been examined with the aim of providing a larger historical perspective of the domination of the indigenous peoples in Mexico since the 15th century. Such domination has been achieved through a variety of military, political, cultural and economic means; however, in the analyses here explored, the common ground is focused on state control of the land and the natural resources of indigenous communities, as well as on their marginalization from political participation under conditions of equality (García de León, 1994, Collier, 1994; Womack, 1999; Gilly, 1997, 2002). Special attention has been paid to the so-called ethno-national debate in Latin America in which the domination of the indigenous peoples is thought of as the result of a class project for the nation (Bate, 1988; Bonfil, 1991; López y Rivas, 2004).

On the other hand, in the last two decades, neoliberal structural reforms in Mexico have strengthened the scale of the processes whereby indigenous communities continue to be marginalized from an active political participation, while perpetuating the process of dispossession of the land and the natural resources. As discussed in chapter three, the modification of Article 27 in 1989 marked the beginning of a counter agrarian reform that put an end to the distribution and social tenure of communal land in the form of peasant communities and *ejidos*. Article 27 was created after the Revolution of 1910, but NAFTA forced the shift of national agriculture towards an export-oriented production, thereby fostering the destruction of the subsistence economy practiced by peasants and indigenous communities. In addition, since the 1950s Chiapas has been transformed into a source of bio-strategic resources such as oil, land and biodiversity. Now Chiapas is at the core of the discussion of the so-called ‘Plan Puebla Panama’, a transnational and capital oriented project introduced during the administration of Ernesto Zedillo (1994-

2000). The Plan envisions the roles of the state, and the Lacandona jungle, as major providers of natural resources and cheap labor force. As recently announced (April, 2007), by the right wing government of Felipe Calderón, the Plan will be one of the government's central priorities.<sup>120</sup>

Yet, in my work the focus on these major state (spatial) projects has not been exhaustive but rather indicative of the basic tension between the state and the indigenous peoples in Chiapas, a tension that has unquestionably been exacerbated as a result of these national scale projects. Also, as I have documented in my work, the uprising has also been the product of a larger local history of rebellion and political organization on the part of indigenous and peasant communities. These rebellions have also taken place against different power figures and structures including the government of the state of Chiapas, the *caciques* and landowners. In the case of the Zapatista communities, there has been an additional mixture with the political oriented pastoral labor of the Dioceses of San Cristóbal, favoring a vision of justice and dignity for the indigenous communities, and the leftist political militant work of *mestizos* with the indigenous communities in Chiapas since the 1970s.

The EZLN struggle has been nurtured by these local and regional experiences of struggle around land and productive issues and, by the demands for justice and political participation made by the indigenous peoples. However, the Zapatista struggle differs from these experiences in several ways. The first, EZLN is an indigenous rebellion contesting neoliberal policies in the country. And, though the Zapatistas are not the first to have used peaceful and civil resistance as a means for political struggle, they have

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<sup>120</sup> See Carlos Fazio (*La Jornada*, Mexico: 2007).



been pioneers in the mobilizing of resistance at the national and global levels. The EZLN has successfully placed indigenous peoples' rights, in the national agenda. And in this regard, the support of national and international civil society to their struggle combined with the pioneering use of the Internet as a means to organize resistance is also notable.<sup>121</sup>

The Zapatista uprising forced the federal government to hold a dialogue with an indigenous group and sign a major political agreement for the first time in the nation's history. This agreement required the government recognized indigenous people's rights to self-determination and autonomy (the San Andres Agreements). So far, the EZLN has been the only indigenous army in Mexico to addressed Congress and explains, to the entire nation, the reasons for their struggle, and the only armed group that has been recognized by the Geneva Convention.<sup>122</sup> And last but not least, the EZLN constitutes the only indigenous rebellion in Mexico that has successfully articulated a (regional) spatial configuration (Zapatista Rebel Territory, MAREZ, Caracoles and Juntas) intended to fulfill the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination and autonomy.

Considering the former historical context, the notion of 'space of dignity' can be now unfolded into more specific meanings without referring to any particular physical space, but to a multilayered array of relationships in accordance to the actual connections between space, dignity and resistance, and resulting from the EZLN's political practice at the local, national and global scales. These political practices have been objectified in the Zapatista Rebel Territory, MAREZ, Caracoles and Juntas, and in the various dimensions of space: material, symbolic and representational.

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<sup>121</sup> See Jeffries (2001), Ronfeldt *et al.* (1999), and Burbach (2001) in Chapter Two.

<sup>122</sup> The recognition of the EZLN as a belligerent force is important to regulate the armed conflict according to the rights and duties established in terms of the international law.

### **Pointing at the hand: unfolding space and dignity in the Rebel Territory**

Tell me with whom you walk and I will tell you where you are.<sup>123</sup> I thought about this saying one day on my way to the Caracol of Oventic in the Highlands of Chiapas. I was traveling in one of the various vehicles that offer cheap public transportation to the town of Bochil, one and a half hours Northeast of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Suddenly a federal Preventive Police Patrol ordered the driver to pull the combi (Volkswagen van) over the side of the highway, and with no justification the police officers singled out the only two young indigenous passengers and searched their bodies and bags. Military and police control of public and private transportation vehicles on state highways, racial profiling and harassment of indigenous people have increased in Chiapas since the Zapatista uprising of 1994. It has become a more noticeable reality and points to the existence of new political and territorial structures (Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Municipalities, Caracoles and Good Government Juntas) dividing the state —politically and spatially —between the territories controlled by the Zapatista Army, and the state municipalities.

Under Zapatista's logic, that is, according to how they have articulated it in several documents, these spaces were built to fulfill specific and very practical needs for their struggle. For instance, the Rebel Municipalities were initially the result of the need to reject the 'Bad Government' (meaning the way in which government is currently exerted against the will of the people). The rejection included its representatives and any form of social and economic support from it. Later the municipalities were re-named as 'Autonomous' so as to indicate the intention of the EZLN to use economic and political

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<sup>123</sup> Tell me with whom you walk and I will tell you who you are, goes the original proverb.

resistance to reorganize the work of the Zapatista bases of support for making their territories fully independent of the Bad Government. As mentioned before, the Aguascalientes responded to the need of providing a space in which to host meetings with civil society; and today, the Caracoles exist to fulfill the need for a space to place, or settle the 'Good Government' represented by the Juntas. And in fact, in *The Thirteen Stele* (2003) the EZLN summarized this long-term process in an even simpler way, by stating that throughout the years, the Zapatistas have 'agreed' to construct a space and to 'name' it, according to the mentioned purposes.

My approach to this process of imagining and constructing such spaces however, is concerned with what these spaces express as a possibility for using resistance to create political and territorial structures to fulfill the EZLN's greater demand: respect for indigenous peoples' dignity. And I have already pointed to the context and specific meanings in which this demand makes sense within the major dimensions that define the nature of the Zapatista rebellion.

My analysis focused on the use of material and symbolic dimensions of space to scale up the Zapatista resistance from the national to the global level. As in the example of the Declarations of the Lacandona Jungle (the EZLN's declarations of principles, reasons and means for struggle), which provided the means to convey a historic and geographical political context for the EZLN's demand for a 'space of dignity.' The concept of dignity for the Zapatistas does not revolve only around universal concerns such as independence, freedom, democracy or justice (shared by other contemporary social movements), but also as a concrete demand for autonomy and territory for the indigenous peoples in Mexico.

I also focused on the ‘breaking’ of the military blockade and the declaration of the Rebel Municipalities, as key moments unveiling a specific spatial politics for the control of the local space. For instance, by means of transforming the Lacandona jungle into a key scale for Zapatista resistance during the National Democratic Convention in 1994, or through the way Zapatismo, has encouraged national civil and peaceful resistance movements as a result of this first major encounter between the EZLN and civil society, and intended to look for a political solution to the conflict in Chiapas. And later with the *Intergaláctico*, which was celebrated in the Lacandona in 1996, and which not only succeeded in bringing international civil society into the political arena but also, in giving the Zapatista struggle a central role in the global resistance to neoliberal globalization.

On the other hand, at a regional level, the role of these spaces can be unpacked as material and symbolic means of organization for different spaces of autonomy, and as a means of organizing resistance to defend the indigenous peoples’ social, economic and cultural rights as these are granted in the Constitution, and have been recognized by the federal government in the San Andres Agreements. The Mexican Constitution recognizes the ‘pluri-cultural’ nature of the nation based on the existence of the indigenous peoples, and has also recognized the right of the indigenous peoples to self-determination and autonomy (Article 2). But the San Andres Agreements brought another fundamental dimension: the recognition of the territorial bases to exert autonomy and the right to govern over land and control of natural resources.

From this general perspective, one could argue that the conflict between the EZLN and the Mexican state is an expression of a basic spatial conflict in which the EZLN’s political resistance has challenging the dominant spatial logic. The EZLN’s

struggle has transformed the Lacandona and the Highlands of Chiapas into key territories for the production of a distinct source of spatial difference, specifically, a logic for organizing space according to the defense of territorial autonomy rather than the logic of capital. This spatial order is based on existing forms of social organization such as the productive structures of the communities organized in *ejidos*, peasant organizations, and also indigenous forms of collective assembly and decision-making. The EZLN has also used these spaces as a coordinated strategy to oppose the state's dominant political, military and paramilitary logic to regain control over indigenous people, the land and the natural resources in the territories controlled by the EZLN in the Highlands and the Lacandona Jungle in Chiapas.

### **Catching the badger? The revolutionary nature of a 'space of dignity'**

As I have argued, in the Zapatista struggle, space, dignity, and resistance are not abstract concepts but ideas and relationships that are being fleshed out in the historical context in which the indigenous peoples confront the major state sponsored projects of dispossession. The Rebel Territory and the other spaces analyzed here are the geographical expression of collective action and Zapatista organizational capacities to confront the power and the domination of the state. Communities have been reorganized as economic spaces for production and economic resistance, the MAREZ as spaces from which to coordinate political resistance, and the Caracoles and Juntas as autonomous spaces in which to make use of the practices of Good Government. Any conclusive reflections of the possibility of constructing a 'space of dignity' must be elaborated from

this practical level, and in the light of the concrete social transformation that the EZLN seeks to achieve.

The ethnographical evidence offers a basic picture of how this practical level has given meaning to the Zapatista struggle as a project aimed at gaining cultural and territorial rights, but also points to the contradictory nature of the spaces created so far. On the one hand, at the material level, autonomy as practical activity is a source for spatial homogenization whereby the coordination of the existent autonomous projects intended to fulfill the EZLN's eleven original demands. From a wider perspective and in comparison to the beginning of the armed uprising in 1994, the Zapatista communities have improved their basic living conditions: the autonomous projects are starting to generate the money and the material resources to sustain the education, health and commercialization projects in the Caracoles, and in time, to expand them on to the interior communities. Autonomy also represents a means to reconstruct the social web that has helped the Zapatista-based communities to strengthen their social and productive life despite the military and paramilitary blockades. Examples of the improved living conditions are: the inauguration and first anniversary of the Zapatista Caracoles and the JBG; the Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Education System, the Health Center 'Clínica Guadalupeana in the Caracol of Oventic, and the Centro de Promotores Culturales 'Compañero Manuel' in the Zapatista municipality of Ricardo Flores Magón.

However, on other hand, under the conditions through which autonomy has been attained, it has underscored the social and geographical differences between the ethnic peoples and within the communities that make up Zapatista territory, e.g. the different degrees of political and economic development, geographical accessibility, and

urbanization, distribution of autonomic projects and money resources. Moreover, the autonomous projects have been articulated unto other scales through the regional commercial circuits and market connections and inevitably result in tensions with caciques and landowners over the control of land and natural resources.

Zapatista communities define autonomy as the right to govern and be governed and people's sovereignty as the demand for respect for the will of the people and their right to modify their form of government. In this regard, tensions arise from the contradictory relationship between the means and the ends of the Zapatista struggle. In spite of the fact the Good Government is being constructed by means of peaceful and civil resistance, and that indigenous peoples have been recognized as legitimate political subjects struggling to generate a major national transformation, still this form of government and the territorial bases that sustain it are the result of an armed war declared by the EZLN to the Mexican state.

Within Rebel Territory, the Good Government signifies a transition from a non-democratic EZLN military structure towards more democratic government structures requiring a full and active role of the communities. Yet, under the current state of affairs, the Good Government contemplates the need to maintain an army (the EZLN), and similarly it has excluded non-indigenous peoples from the Good Government. In regard to the recognition of the regional dimension as the basic level of the Good Government, and to the possibility of integrating it into the other levels recognized by the national Constitution, the primary tensions arise from the legal framework itself. Basically, there is no legal recognition of the existence of the region as a fourth level of government, nor

are indigenous peoples are recognized as political entities that can exercise govern under these territorial bases.

As I pointed out before, these concrete conditions are important to acknowledge when thinking about the contribution of this struggle to the notion of a 'space of dignity' as a framework to reflect on the possibilities of space as a means for revolutionary transformation. In the Zapatista struggle autonomy and resistance are not ends by themselves but only means to generate a transformation. For now, MAREZ, Caracoles and Juntas are material spaces structuring and reflecting a larger, regional, social and spatial order that has been articulated from the communities, regions and zones. The long-term goal is that of constructing a 'space of dignity' (although at a different pace and with noteworthy tensions). At the local scale, the resistance of the communities has been the practical means by which to generate the conditions for independence from the Bad Government, and to actively participate in the creation of the values, the symbols and the meanings that are giving meaning to the totality of the struggle in accordance to the Zapatista notion: 'command by obeying'. At the national scale, the building of political alliances will possibility help fulfill the San Andres Agreements as these are the legal and legitimate bases from which to generate a major transformation for the indigenous peoples in the country. And finally, at the global scale, the call for resistance, the forums and international encounters organized by the Zapatistas constitute the practical means for transformation of the EZLN rebellion into a referent of struggle against neoliberal globalization.

However, the emancipatory possibilities of space face major constraints in the case of the Zapatista struggle. The very contradictory nature of the type of spaces that



have been constructed, and the dominant spatial order produced by the state result in these constraints. From this perspective, one can argue that the possibilities for constructing a 'space of dignity' cannot be fulfilled through autonomy and resistance by themselves; but instead must be an organic part of the production of space. Again, the Zapatista rebellion does not look for the mere recognition of indigenous cultural, political or territorial rights, or its spatial referents in abstract. The aim of the EZLN is to create its form and its content within the context of the nation state. Thus, the notion of a 'space of dignity' inquires about the possibility of objectifying a political practice reaffirmed through the notion of dignity within specific geographical circumstances. As space, dignity serves to meaning, but it can serve to produce alternative material practices, symbols and representation of space. The dominant spatial order that has been produced by the state, is an order used to exercise violence and domination over indigenous peoples, hence, dignity and the possibility of constructing a 'space of dignity' constitutes a response to state violence, and also a means of reaffirming the EZLN's political practice through space.

The Zapatista struggle, however, also points in a different direction. It has been commonly recognized that the Zapatista rebellion has significantly re-appropriated universal emancipatory principles and alluded to the notions of justice, democracy, sovereignty, citizenship, and dignity, and has re-symbolized and rearticulated them into particular goals, expressed through a set of indigenous demands for cultural, political and territorial rights. There is a correspondence between these general and concrete levels in the context of the conflict between the indigenous peoples and the neoliberal state in Mexico but its meanings cannot be taken for granted.

Recent literature on cultural and identity politics as well as on social movements (Speed, 2002; De Sousa, 2002) questions the process of adopting primary liberal values and ideas that lack a true universal content, and which originated in modern Western 19th and 20th century social and political thought. Such frameworks are therefore particular to Western societies and political systems. Under democratic systems, justice –as the priority social value embracing the defense of individual rights and liberties against the nation state, overrides other values (democracy, sovereignty, and citizenship), which in turn normalize the system ruling, ordering, and regulating the relationships between the authority exerted by the state and civil society. It is often assume that this relationship ought to be based on the respect for state institutions, equal political participation and distribution of rights. Lastly, the system is also based on a set of ethical (moral) values, social and civic institutions that guarantee an active participation for citizens in the regulation of the authority and under the basis of legitimacy and sovereignty.<sup>124</sup>

It is from this historical context that the EZLN's has not called for seizing state power but rather for people to fully exercise their sovereignty and right to citizenship. Sovereignty and citizenship are the spheres from where legitimacy and moral authority in the exercise of power is constructed and derived and also identified as a revolutionary practice in the struggle to reach a resolution to the conflict in Chiapas. However, even though this form of revolutionary practice can be examined in regard the Zapatista appeal to (liberal) equality on the one hand and, from the priority the Zapatistas have assigned to the affirmation of moral values on the other, the emancipatory possibilities of this political and moral affirmation cannot be taken for granted, and must be analyzed in light

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<sup>124</sup> The full reference of these concepts can be found in: Outhwaite & Bottomore, eds. (Oxford: 1993).

of the EZLN's greater demand for the construction of a 'space of dignity' for indigenous peoples.

First, one could argue that Zapatista prioritization of dignity as a social and moral value has re-signified the notion of defending individual rights and liberties against the nation state. However, the EZLN has established the process of defending collective rights as a pre-condition for the demand for autonomy. Second, since the recognition of this right is not meant to be a mere possibility but in fact it is a right granted by the national Constitution, the prioritization of dignity comes as an affirmation of the people's sovereignty and citizenship—a demand for respect of the legal means to exert authority—but fundamentally, a moral affirmation that the state must respect the will of the people. However, if we are to assume that under these premise the demand for a 'space of dignity' becomes a possible means from which to begin the transformation of the relationship between indigenous peoples and the state, particularly if we consider the demands for equality and respect to indigenous cultural and territorial specificities as member of the nation as legitimate, some important questions arise, specially when thinking about the possibility of eventually producing this 'space of dignity' in its material, symbolic and representational dimensions.

On the one hand, I have noticed that the practice of indigenous autonomy in the Zapatista Rebel Territory has created social and spatial tensions within the municipalities, the communities, and in the accompaniment process. Particularly in terms of economic uneven development, the unbalanced progress of the Good Government Juntas, gender relationships, the separation of the military from the political structures, the revolt nature of the Juntas, and the hierarchical structure of indigenous communities. However, these

tensions are meant to be transitory stages in the process of territorializing the relationships and meanings that sustain the Good Government Juntas, and thus, only a component of the larger process of maintaining a sense of continuity to the Zapatista struggle.

But on the other hand, it becomes a necessity to acknowledge the risks of representing the emancipatory content of dignity in terms of cultural forms of indigenous identity. To some extent, this obscures the fundamental class interest of indigenous peoples as these are embedded in the defense of autonomy and territory from the neoliberal state. Neoliberalism is quintessentially a class project in which the state and the indigenous peoples confront each other from antagonistic positions of power. Therefore, dignity as the basis of an envisioned equality for indigenous peoples is not impossible but might be contradictory in its origin, and furthermore, it could lead to a non-conflictive understanding of dignity as an emancipatory concept, as well as to the assumption that space is a non problematic dimension of social transformation.

From a disciplinarian perspective, this notion of a ‘space of dignity’ is a possibility from which to explore the production of a ‘revolutionary’ space (Lefebvre, 1994). Since they have not realized ‘the full potential’ of the revolution the Zapatistas are looking for, the concrete spaces produced as a result of the Zapatista rebellion—the Rebel Territory, MAREZ, Caracoles, and Juntas—do not in themselves constitute revolutionary spaces. However, the process of its social production and its contradictory nature constitutes an opportunity to explore the production of multicultural and pluriethnic spaces within the particularities imposed on the indigenous question by neoliberalism. Moreover, the notion can serve to comparatively explore the relations

between space and dignity in other indigenous and social struggles that are holding a central role in the larger process of fighting for justice and resisting neoliberal globalization at a global scale.

In this way, if we are to conclude that the notion of a 'space of dignity' represents a 'dimension of the possible', an idea also developed by Lefebvre (1963) to think about the possibility to 'escape' from the dominant capitalist rationality of space, we will still need to inquire about the potential contradictions of a project that seeks to defeat capitalism by producing a revolutionary space. As analyzed here, in the Zapatista's attempt to eventually 'catch the badger' of neoliberal globalization, the production of a 'space of dignity' still can be a new source of spatial contradiction.

## APPENDIX I

Back to 2002, when I did my first fieldwork trip to the Zapatista Rebel Territory in Chiapas, the functioning of the Civil Camps for Peace, which maintained a network of civil observers in the Zapatista communities, required a lot of community work, and it involved close coordination between the Aguascalientes (functioning then as the main door gates for the members of civil societies) and the Zapatista-based communities. At the time, the autonomous authorities in the different Zapatista head municipalities were in charge of sending the civil observers to those communities where the military presence was stronger and represented a major threat to the families. Plus the communities that received the volunteers in the camps had to be materially able to host them. In 2002, I volunteered in one of these Civil Camps. Ixim, the community where I was assigned to was located two-days away from Francisco Gómez, deep in Las Cañadas region, and hence I traveled with three Zapatista guides. Similarly, when I left Ixim, the plan for my departure was discussed and carefully scheduled to match the same day twenty-two men were transporting the community's sacks of coffee grains to be sold in Ocosingo. That

way no extra men and no extra time would be needed in order to take me out of the Zapatista territory.

At first, I assumed these measures as reasonably practical and for security reasons, but with time I got to realized to what extent these tangible but unseen forms of accounting for the human labor and resources that are needed to keep the civil camps functioning, are expressing a wider complex cultural and political interaction between the Zapatistas and the *campamentistas* (volunteers). New *campamentistas* are constantly coming and going within the Rebel Territory, so the mutual understanding of collaborative work and solidarity requires a highly practical sense of rights and duties. As one of the oldest men in Ixim told me very straightforwardly: “Subcomandante Marcos has been very clear, the *campamentista* must come here in solidarity, not to spy on us. They can inquire all they want about the *costumbres* (indigenous customs and beliefs) but they are not authorized to ask anything with reference to Zapatismo” (Field notes, February 2002). As a matter of fact, I tried to get that authorization from the community’s assembly but for reasons that belong to the Zapatista procedures, such permission was not granted at that time. In 2004, when the Caracoles were already inaugurated, I tried for a second time to obtain permission to conduct direct interviews with the Zapatista authorities, but then the process of obtaining the authorization from the Good Government Junta was complicated by the rotating nature of the Juntas. I had to present my request to different Juntas every time, and although I was not rejected to do the interviews, I could not complete the requirements to eventually get the proper authorizations within the time I had to conclude my fieldwork research.

I cannot say that the relationship or the kind of collaborative work between the EZLN and the volunteers is easy, and I am not saying it should be that way. I rather observe that doing fieldwork in a conflict zone, and in indigenous communities that are subjected to harsh conditions of living, has greater limitations and creates particular problems (methodological and practical) I was not trained or prepared to face.

In my case the impossibility of making direct interviews with people in the Rebel Territory limited considerably not only my original expectations of constructing a closer ethnographical approach and comparing the workings of the communities in resistance before and after the phase of the Good Government. But it did not allow me to entirely ground one of the central themes for my dissertation: the notion of dignity, which is a complex and abstract as much as highly symbolic and culturally specific notion.

But I had some other practical limitations too: of ethnicity, because of the fact that your ‘visibility’ as a non-indigenous people makes you an obvious target of attention in the eyes of the military that are posted at all access points to the indigenous regions in Chiapas; and also because of how your *mestizo* identity is reinterpreted by the indigenous as an ‘outsider’ and in contexts that very often are dominated by a great presence of foreign volunteers.<sup>125</sup> Geographical accessibility, distances and the terrain make the access to some places in the Rebel Territory especially difficult and time- consuming because of the precarious and insufficient public transportation. And finally, those limitations related to language and gender.

I am a Spanish native speaker with no capabilities in any indigenous languages, and so once in the communities my interactions were more biased and basically reduced

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<sup>125</sup> The dominance of foreign nationalities among the volunteers participating in the camps, results ethnographically significant. However, here it is difficult to evaluate the reasons of this composition in terms of the relationship between the EZLN and the national and international civil society.



to men. Men are the ones who interact more with the *campamentistas* because they are bilingual in one or several of the indigenous languages spoken in the state, and they speak the Castilla (Spanish). My interaction with women was limited and in fact, reduced to the few of them who spoken the *Castilla*. I must notice that at some point the barrier of language contributed to create a strong sense of disconnection from the community, as in the following situation in Ixim. On a Sunday mass celebration, and after a long discussion the community –women, men and children– shared their thoughts about the Gospel. Everything was read aloud in Tzeltal –and everything was comprehensible but not for me. Suddenly, a woman stood up and pronounced a few words in *Castilla*: “Dios es la fuerza de la comunidad” (God is the force of the community) (Field notes, February, 2002). For a moment her words narrowed my sense of disconnection but in spite of that, the gap was still there.

In my dissertation I described my first field work trip as a ‘mirroring experience’ in order to express my sense of confusion as a researcher when approaching the people, meanings, spaces, places, rhythms and representations of social processes and human experiences in a context determined by domination and resistance relationships.<sup>126</sup> The Zapatista communities are complex spaces for cultural interaction, and as I said before, this can result in a mirroring experience in which the observer could get confused in capturing the most ‘precise’ or ‘objective’ senses of the practices of ‘collectiveness’ that make the Zapatista communities recognizable as active political subjects of resistance (e.g. the logic of government, the cultural practices, moral values, spatialities, etc.). The experience could get harder for more practical reasons, such as when you are trying to do

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<sup>126</sup> See chapter five.

your research in a community like Ixim, where military helicopters were flying by on an everyday basis.

I found these concerns similar to what Friedman (1992) pointed out years ago about the politics of identity, when he described the constitution of identity as ‘an elaborate and deadly serious game of mirrors’: “It is a complex temporal interaction of multiple practices of identification external and internal to a subject or population. In order to understand the constitutive process it is, thus, necessary to be able to situate the mirrors in space and their movement in time” (pp. 853). However, I am not an expert and neither have the necessary background to discuss in depth the topic of the relationship between the practical and the theoretical dimensions of the issues I have just described. Nevertheless from a disciplinary perspective, I do consider a better methodological training in fieldwork techniques is necessary to allow graduate students to deal with the dilemmas of objectivity, engagement and advocacy roles in the field. As Speed (2006) has suggested (though in regard to anthropological practice), questions such as the ethics of research, and cultural relativism are important tensions that must be addressed when doing fieldwork in topics related with human rights or social conflict.

In my own experience, the concerns about how to balance the communities’ needs of political advocacy required from me as a volunteer, must be reconciled with the Zapatista rejection of my own academic interests and research goals: how to create a better dialogue, if cultural backgrounds were so different to mine, as were gender roles, and power relationships in general; or how to maintain objectivity when accounting for communities living under harsh social conditions, and under military and paramilitary blockade. All of these were major concerns that would require a better ‘positioning’ of

myself as a researcher. As Earle & Simonelli (2005) have recognized, the Zapatista communities are not any more passive, observed or traditional research subjects but they are participating in the process of giving direction to the research done about Zapatismo.

For all these reasons, I see my own limitations as an opportunity to explore the complex intertwining between doing geographical research and conducting fieldwork in conflict zones. Geographical training needs to acknowledge more the particular concerns involved in doing research under these circumstances. Neither the communities, nor the fieldwork interests, nor the knowledge produced are neutral arenas. And so the process of how you, as a graduate student, construct your own identity, and how you utilized this identity in positioning yourself as a researcher before the subjects, should not be taken for granted.

### Acronyms

AEDPCH	Asamblea Estatal Democrática del Pueblo Chiapaneco, or State Democratic Assembly of the Chiapaneco People.
ANCIEZ	Alianza Nacional Campesina Indígena Emiliano Zapata, or National Peasant Indigenous Alliance Emiliano Zapata.
APPO	Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca, or Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca.
ARIC	Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo, or Rural Association of Collective Interest.
ASA	Acuerdos de San Andrés, or San Andres Agreements.
CAPISE	Centro de Análisis Político e Investigaciones Sociales y Económicas, A.C.
CCRI-CG	Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena, or Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee.
CDHFBC	Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas.
CELMRAZ	Centro de Español y Lenguas Mayas Rebelde Autónomo Zapatista, or Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Spanish and Maya Languages Center.
CEOIC	Consejo Estatal de Organizaciones Indígenas y Campesinas, or State Council of Peasant and Indigenous Organizations.
CIACH	Centro de Información y Análisis de Chiapas.
CIEPAC	Centro de Investigaciones Económicas y Políticas de Acción Comunitaria.
CIESAS	Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social.
CND	Convención Nacional Democrática, or National Democratic Convention.
COCOPA	Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación, or Commission of Concordance and Peace.
COMPA	Convergencia de Movimientos de los Pueblos de las Américas, or Convergence of Movements of Peoples of the Americas.
CONAI	Comisión Nacional de Intermediación, or National Intermediation Commission.

DESMI	Desarrollo Económico y Social de los Mexicanos Indígenas.
DSL	Declaraciones de la Selva Lacandona, or Declarations of the Lacandona Jungle.
EPRAZ	Escuela Primaria Autónoma Zapatista, or Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Primary School.
ESRAZ	Escuela Secundaria Rebelde Autónoma Zapatista, or Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Secondary School.
EZLN	Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or Zapatista National Liberation Army.
FLN	Frente de Liberación Nacional, or Front of National Liberation.
FZLN	Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, Zapatista Front of National Liberation.
GNP	Gross National Product.
GTR	Gobierno Rebelde en Transición, or Rebel Government of Transition.
ILO	International Labor Organization.
IMF	International Monetary Fund.
INI	Instituto Nacional Indigenista.
INM	Insituto Nacional de Migración.
JBG	Juntas de Buen Gobierno, or Good Government Juntas.
LIW	Low Intensity War.
MAREZ	Municipios Autónomos Rebeldes Zapatistas, or Zapatista Autonomous Rebel Municipalities.
MDG	Millennium Development Goals.
MLN	Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, or National Liberation Movement.
MRZ	Municipios Rebeldes Zapatistas, or Zapatista Rebel Municipalities.
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement.

NGO	Non Government Organization.
PAN	Partido de Acción Nacional, or Party of National Action.
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática, or Party of the Democratic Revolution.
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or Revolutionary Institutional Party.
RIMBA	Reserva Integral de la Biósfera de Montes Azules, or Biosphere Integral Reserve of Montes Azules
SERZLN-ZACH	Sistema Educativo Rebelde Autónomo Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Education System of National Liberation of the Highlands of Chiapas.
SIPAZ	Servicios Internacionales para la Paz, or International Services for Peace.
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund.
UN	United Nations.
WTO	World Trade Organization.

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