

A brief history of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation

by Raúl Romero on January 1, 2014

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Behind the EZLN lies a complex web of political and cultural visions extending far beyond indigenous resistance and speaking to universal emancipation.

November 17, 2013, marked the 30th anniversary of the formation of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), and on January 1, 2014 the EZLN celebrates 20 years since its first public appearance. As a form of tribute to the men and women who made that cry of ENOUGH (YA BASTA) echo worldwide, we want to present a series of installments which try to look at the history of the actors who linked together to give rise to the EZLN. To do this, various sources have been used, but especially the writings, interviews and communiqués that the neo-Zapatistas themselves have generated.

The text is divided into three sections: I: [The Guerrilla Nucleus](#), II: [The Millenarian Resistance](#) and III: [The Option for the Poor](#). Clarification is needed: it has not been our intention to speak for the Zapatistas, they have told their story and continue to do so. Our only goal is to contribute to the dissemination of their experience, which undoubtedly represents the most advanced alternative in the world. Hopefully these lines are also useful to feed the story of another possible world that is now being built.



I. The Guerrilla Nucleus

"...the human condition ... has a stubborn tendency to bad conduct. Where it is least expected, rebellion jumps out and dignity occurs. In the mountains of Chiapas, for example. For a long time the indigenous Maya had been silent. The Maya culture is a culture of patience, it knows how to wait. Now, how many people speak through those mouths? The Zapatistas are in Chiapas, but they are everywhere. They are few, but they have many spontaneous ambassadors. Since no one names these ambassadors, no one can dismiss them. Since no one pays them, no one can count them. Or buy them."

— *El Desafío*, Eduardo Galeano [1]

It is 1968, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the US dispute world hegemony in a disguised war: the "Cold War." In Czechoslovakia, the "Prague Spring" shows the world the authoritarianism and bureaucracy of the "actually existing socialism." The protesters are fighting for a "socialism with a human face," but above all for a democratic one. The response of the USSR and its allies is the invasion of the country. In France the "French May" is evidence — among many other things — of a widespread rejection of the consumer society.

It is 1968 and the Americas are also restless. In Latin America the triumph of the Cuban revolution is still generating expectations, and thousands of young people join the ranks of the revolutionary parties and movements. In the US, Martin Luther King – leader of the civil rights movement – is assassinated, and the demonstrations against the invasion of Vietnam further polarize North American society.

It is 1968, Mexico will host the Olympic Games, and in July one of the most important student movements in its history emerges. The political and social conditions in the country make a seemingly minor conflict rapidly acquire national dimensions. Mexico is again in tune – as it was during the 1910 revolution – with the social discontent walking the world. Gustavo Díaz Ordaz and Luis Echeverría Álvarez – Chairman and Secretary of the Interior of Mexico respectively – order the repression of a student demonstration. On October 2nd, military and paramilitary groups attack the protesters in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, Tlatelolco, Mexico City, causing hundreds of dead, missing and injured.

It is 1969 and the world is not the same after the "Cultural Revolution" of 1968, as Hobsbawm calls it [3]. It is 1969, and Mexico is still hurting: many families have been searching for their children since that October 2nd when they did not return to their homes. Meanwhile, the Mexican government justifies the massacre, arguing that the first attack came from the students, that there were foreigners interested in destabilizing the country, and that the specter of communism was behind the protests.

Hundreds of young people who had participated in the student demonstrations concluded that they would not manage to transform Mexico by the institutional route. For many of them, the peaceful route was exhausted and it was time to move on to the next stage: armed struggle.

On August 6th, 1969, in Monterrey, Nuevo León, the National Liberation Forces (FLN) was founded. Leading the group were the brothers Cesar Germán and Fernando Muñoz Yáñez, Alfredo Zárate and Raúl Pérez Vázquez. The group had the strategy of building up its forces in silence and not confronting the state forces. In 1972, Cesar Germán

Yáñez was established in the state of Chiapas in the camp called “El Diamante,” from which the “Emiliano Zapata Guerrilla Nucleus” (NGEZ) operated. Five years after its founding, the FLN had networks in Tabasco, Puebla, the State of Mexico, Chiapas, Veracruz and Nuevo León [4].

While the FLN had a Marxist-Leninist ideology, the group was far from falling into dogmatism. Since its foundation, the FLN established the overall aim of the creation of an army and adopted as its motto the phrase of independence fighter Vicente Guerrero: “Live for the motherland or die for freedom.”

On February 14th, 1974, the FLN were attacked by police and military forces in one of its main safe houses, “The Big House,” located in San Miguel Nepantla in the State of Mexico. Mario Arturo Acosta Chaparro participated in the operation, one of the major players in the dirty war in Mexico, who was later repeatedly accused of having links to organized crime.

In “The Big House” five guerrillas were killed and 16 others were arrested. The persecution against the FLN extended to Ocosingo, Chiapas, where the camp “*El Diamante*” was attacked and several members of the NGEZ were killed; some more managed to escape, including Cesar Germán Yáñez. “Newspaper reports – writes Laura Castellanos – say that in mid-April 1974, the surviving group led by Cesar Germán was wiped out by the army in the jungle. His brother Fernando was then transferred to Chiapas and with a brigade searched for him and his group without success. [5]”

From 1974 to 1983 the history of the FLN is somewhat unclear, since there are not many records from that period. During this time the FLN conducted more frequent incursions in the Lacandon Jungle and restarted the recruitment stage. It was a time when many students were recruited from universities where Marxism was riding high, as was the case of the Autonomous Metropolitan University and the Autonomous University of Chapingo. Also during this period (1974-1983), many of the activities of the FLN were situated in the state of Chiapas. In 1977, for example, they set up a camp in Huitiupán, and a year later they set up a safe house in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

The work conducted by the FLN in Chiapas allowed them to build up solidarity networks with local organizations which had done previous work with the indigenous in the region: Maoist groups, people who prompted the formation of cooperatives, and indigenous people who had been encouraged to develop community work by the Catholic Church, primarily driven by Bishop Samuel Ruíz.

The experiences of armed fronts in Central America, such as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in El Salvador, the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua, or the civil war that lasted for more than thirty years in Guatemala, revived the intention of the FLN to form an army – not a guerrilla group, but a regular army – and the successful work in Chiapas since 1980 resulted in the acronym FLN-EZLN beginning to be included in guerrilla documents.

Nevertheless, it is since November 17, 1983, when helped again by a politicized indigenous group with plenty of organizational experience – from which later emerged commanders such as Major Mario or Major Yolanda – and reinforced by the new militants from the universities, that the first camp of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, called “The Tick, [6]” was established.

Interviewed by Yvon Le Bot and Maurice Najman, Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos explained that the three major components of the EZLN are “a political-military group, a group of politicized and very experienced indigenous, and an indigenous movement

from the Jungle. [7]” The third group to which Marcos refers began to be a crucial part of the organization after 1983, a period when the EZLN began a second phase of “building up its forces in silence;” but this time looking for fighters mainly among indigenous in the region who had no previous experience of political militancy. For this task, the politicized indigenous acted as a bridge, but as well as the cultural barrier (in which language was a major obstacle), the secrecy and mistrust of the indigenous — caused by centuries of oppression and contempt — made it difficult for *mestizos* to gain access to the communities.

The first members of the EZLN who penetrated into the Lacandon jungle soon began to live a reality very different and quite alien to that which their ideological affiliation allowed them to see. In the early years not only did they not build confidence with the indigenous, quite the opposite: “Sometimes they persecuted us because they said we were cattle thieves, or witches or bandits. Many of those who are now *compañeros* or even commanders in the Committee hounded us at that time because they thought we were bad people. [8]”

Contact with indigenous communities led to a kind of conversion of the original group. Marcos tells of this process in these words:

We really suffered a process of re-education, of restyling. As if they had disarmed us. As if they had dismantled all we were made up of – Marxism, Leninism, socialism, urban culture, poetry, literature – all that formed part of us, and things we did not even know we had. They disarmed us and then armed us again, but in a different way. And that was the only way to survive. [9]

As we said above, the work that the guerrilla nucleus of the FLN developed in Chiapas could only mature and become the EZLN through the cosmovision and tradition of resistance of different indigenous groups.



II. The Millenarian Resistance

“In the committee we debated all afternoon.
We searched for the word in the tongue to say SURRENDER, and we did not find it.
It has no translation in Tzotzil and Tzeltal.
Nobody remembers that the word exists in Tojolabal or Chol.”

— *Surrender does not exist in true language, Subcomandante Marcos [10]*

“Mexico is many Mexicos,” the saying goes, and most of the time conventional wisdom summarizes in short phrases what scholars and researchers express in hundreds of pages. “Mexico is many Mexicos,” not only because of the heterogeneity of the country, but also, and primarily, due to the variety of peoples who have inhabited and still inhabit their territory.

The state of Chiapas is an example of this geographical and cultural diversity that characterizes the entire country. Its story encapsulates the history of many peoples of Mexico and Latin America: a story of peoples who were violently conquered and have resisted, and who today, more than five hundred years later, still resist and have managed to retain many of their traditions.

Generally, resistance as collective social action is given by indigenous groups in response to invasions (or attempts to invade) the territory they inhabit. In this sense, resistance is more a reaction than an action, an act of territorial and cultural self-defense by indigenous groups against an offensive by foreign forces. The acts of resistance can be active or passive, violent or non-violent, armed or unarmed, and almost always the group or groups who exercise it are at a disadvantage, that is to say the correlation of forces – numerical or operative – is unfavorable to them.

In an attempt to categorize the various forms of resistance he has studied, James Scott [11] notes that there are forms of publicly declared resistance and forms of resistance which are disguised, low-profile, undeclared: the former seek attention (strikes, boycotts, rebellions, petitions,) while the latter remain in the field of infra-politics (not visible, intimate, symbolic.) While the hidden form of resistance escapes the eye at first glance, it is worth noting that this form “provides much of the cultural and structural underpinnings of the more visible political action” [12], that is, of the public form of resistance.

When the Spanish conquistadors arrived in the territory we now know as Chiapas, they found civilizations highly advanced in the political, economic, architectural and military spheres, to name a few aspects. The area was inhabited by a group of nations who were in solidarity, participatory and complementary, but also in conflict.

At that time, Antonio García de León recounts [13], it was the “Chiapa” or “Chiapas” culture which maintained control of the territory, largely thanks to the military power that it had developed. As in other parts of the Americas, some native peoples viewed the conquerors as allies with whom to confront the dominant culture. So it was with Zinacantecos, who decided to support the conquerors in the battle against the Chiapa. The war to conquer the region began in 1524 and the resistance of the natives delayed the taking of the city for four years; not until 1528 could troops led by Diego de Mazariegos be established in the region.

Gradually, the conquerors started defeating different native peoples by military force. Others were compelled to take refuge in the mountains. In fact, they continued to resist in the disguised, low-profiles, undeclared ways mentioned by Scott, as they kept reproducing their history, memory and language, and even adopted some forms of Catholicism, which were reinterpreted and appropriated by the cosmivision of the original peoples.

The war continued in part because of the division among the Spaniards and at the insistence of the indigenous peoples, but above all because of the cruel treatment, the smothering tax system — which was incorporated into the laws of New Spain — and the warrior tradition of the Maya peoples. The resistance on several occasions took on its publicly declared form, and the first rebellions arose.

Rebellion is, as described above, the publicly declared form of resistance. Rebellions often arise when the subjected classes are exposed to excessive treatment by the dominant class(es) or group(s) and involves disobedience, opposition and/or rejection of authority. It is also an open questioning of the legitimacy of those in power for their excessive forms of control or oppression, and although it can be peaceful or armed, violent or non-violent, rebellion is always an act of confrontation. Rebellions are characterized as processes confined to a limited geographic area and are more or less spontaneous. While, in their origin, rebellions have historically lacked an alternative project, it is also true that many — in their phase of greatest maturity — have spawned revolutionary processes.

Of the various rebellions that took place during the colony in Chiapas, different historians emphasize the Tzeltal Rebellion of 1712, even to the extent of calling it the “Republic of Cancuc” or the “Tzeltal Republic.” Let’s take a quick look at these events.

The prickly relationship between indigenous and colonizers entered into a new crisis in 1711, due fundamentally to the persecution by the Catholic church of natives who claimed to have witnessed divine manifestations. The first event occurred in the Tzotzil community of Santa María, where a “virgin with indigenous features” was revealed in a piece of carved wood to the Tzotziles Dominica López and Juan Gómez. The apparition generated a commotion among neighboring communities, which is why the Inquisition confiscated the image.

Months later, while the communities were still speaking of the “apparition of the virgin”, the Catholic saints San Sebastián and San Pedro made their apparition in the village of San Pedro Chenalhó. This led to the idea that “the end of the world was approaching,” which touched the collective conscience of the people of the region.

Moreover, the smothering tax system of the captaincy, and the huge commissions charged by Bishop Juan Bautista Álvarez de Toledo, fuelled social discontent, leading to thousands of Indians to rebel against the authorities of New Spain. At this time, the figure of the virgin was seen again, on this occasion by María de la Candelaria, an indigenous Tzeltal from the community of Cancuc; this was interpreted by the rebels as a new message. The rebels found in María Candelaria “a medium to communicate with the virgin,” and to protect her formed the army “soldiers of the virgin,” which brought together 32 Tzeltal, Tzotzil and Chol communities, and reached a total of three thousand militiamen in its ranks.

The “soldiers of the virgin” were recruiting supporters through the practice of semi-clandestine cults, thus showing that the native peoples had maintained their organizational structures and had retained a certain independence from the Crown.

The rebellion of the original peoples was strengthened again when Sebastián Gómez de la Gloria, a Tzotzil Indian who claimed to have traveled to heaven and talked to “God the father,” began to invest Indian priests, distribute powers and bless the rebel army. Nearby communities began to ignore all power not emanating from Cancuc, and Spanish priests and religious figures began to be persecuted and executed. The insurgents named their own authorities and several villages were renamed.

Inter-ethnic conflicts, fueled by the Spaniards, the co-optation of some of the leaders and the brutal onslaught of the army of New Spain ended the “Republic of Cancuc,” but it was not until 1727 that they arrested the perpetrators of the rebellion and their children, so as “not to leave the seeds of rebellion at liberty.” The colonizers took it upon themselves to keep the defeat alive in the memory of the insurgents. One example is Pedro de Zavaleta, who in revenge for the murder of Ladinós and Spaniards undertook to cut an ear from all those whom he considered members or accomplices of the rebellion. The indigenous peoples returned again — consciously or unconsciously — to the hidden resistance. But although there were public demonstrations on more than one occasion, none were of the magnitude of the Tzeltal Republic.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the resistance continued, sometimes in its public form, at others in its hidden form, but the opposition to domination was always there. It is true that the Indians of the region, like those throughout the continent of America, experienced an extermination that wiped out most of the population, leading to Tzvetan Todorov calling the conquest “the greatest genocide in human history.”[14] But still, either by joining the ranks of the independence army or by strengthening the Liberation Army of the South under the leadership of Emiliano Zapata during the revolution, the Indian peoples of Chiapas actively participated in the construction of the Mexican nation. Mythical figures like Juan López or rebellions such as that in Yucatan in 1847 fed both the memory and rebel practice.

Some resistances involve building new forms of social and political organization, as in the case of the Maya peoples: taking some expressions from Catholicism and colonial political organization; but also creating new forms of self-subsistence, the Chiapas ethnicities survived the conquest and settlement. In the independent Mexico they faced exploitation and marginalization from new figures in power, for example, from those of “enlightened Caciquism” or the “Chiapan Family,” clear evidence of internal colonialism.

The long war of colonization faced by the indigenous peoples of Latin America, particularly those of Chiapas, has failed to strip them of their identity. The policies of extermination, social cleansing and ethnocide resulted, as “an undesired effect of war”, in the strengthening of the social cohesion and the collective consciousness of the Indian people. In this regard, it is worth saying that the war of conquest, colonialism and neo-colonialism failed at the cultural and ideological level. It failed to impose Western rationality as the only way of thinking, and Catholic religion as the only form of spiritual expression. This millenarian resistance makes itself present again in the EZLN. As González Casanova describes it:

The Maya stand out among the peoples who have most resisted the conquest. In Yucatan and Guatemala, they were not subjugated until 1703, and soon rebelled again. In Chiapas they staged a major revolt in 1712. The Chilam Balam says, ‘then came the secret pleading, the pleading with rage, the pleading with violence, the pleading without mercy.’ And those same people returned to rebellion again on the first of January, 1994. [15]

The long tradition of resistance and rebellion of the indigenous peoples intertwined with the thought and practice of the Marxist National Liberation Forces to give rise to the EZLN. However, it is also worth highlighting the work previously performed in the region by a current in of Catholic Church under the leadership of Bishop Samuel Ruiz García.

III. The Option for the Poor

During the war of conquest and the process of colonization, there were figures who denounced the atrocities carried out by the representatives of the Spanish crown against the indigenous. These voices found an important resonance within the Catholic Church. An exemplary case is that of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas. Centuries later, during the war of independence, two priests again played an important role: Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and José María Morelos y Pavón. However, it is not until the second half of the 20th century that the role of the church and some of their representatives accompanying social movements was analyzed in depth.

In an attempt to renew and strengthen the Catholic Church, Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council, which took place between 1962 and 1965. At that meeting ancient differences within Catholicism surfaced, especially those between the “anti-modern” and the “modernist.” As part of this Council, Pope Paul VI – who succeeded John Paul XXIII after his death – called on the Latin American Episcopal Council to renew its vision and practice to make it more consistent with the reality of the continent.

In response to this call, various priests in Latin America set out to the task of preparing for the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellín, Colombia, in August and September 1968. The conference had a global impact on the Catholic Church due to its composition, the issues addressed and the conclusions it reached.

We emphasize some of these elements:

- a) The concluding documents of the conference not only addressed issues that went beyond the scope of the Catholic Church, but openly revealed a political position in local contexts. Some of these documents addressed issues of lay movements, media, justice, poverty, pastoral popular (popular religion), and so on.
- b) Many of the ideas expressed during the meeting in Medellín strengthened the opinion that the church should denounce the systematic oppression of the poor and the exploitation of societies in the Third World.
- c) Not only priests participated, there were also religious, laity, and an important representation from the Base Ecclesiastical Communities – a social movement born in the same context – which meant an open willingness to work with the society, in strategic actions as well.
- d) The attendees put a strong emphasis on the historical and structural differences between Latin America and Europe; so, despite assuming themselves to be part of the same church, they said that their roles were different.
- e) The attendees agreed not only to take on the role of denouncing exploitation and oppression, but also to pass to the sphere of action and to assist in any way necessary so that, in an organized way, impoverished people could succeed in modifying their state of poverty.

The results of the Medellín Conference encouraged religious and lay people to study in depth the role of the church in Latin America, looking at the characteristics of a continent marked by strong and noticeable exploitative relationships, generated by the structures – colonial and capitalist – of material production.

This renewed interest in the role of the Catholic Church in Latin America led several intellectuals to rediscover the role of some priests who were close to the social struggles, and to build a historical view of that role, giving rise to the Theology of Liberation (TL, as per the Spanish acronym.)

The philosopher Enrique Dussel identifies three generations of theologians of liberation: the first is the one which during colonial times undertook a criticism of the Spanish crown and sided with the Indians. Certain figures stand out, such as Fray Antonio de Montesinos, Fray Domingo de Vico and Fray Bartolomé de las Casas. The second generation would be represented by José María Morelos y Pavón, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and Fray Servando Teresa de Mier; they led the fight to make Mexico a free and independent nation. The third generation appears in the second half of the 20th century and becomes articulate after the Medellín Conference. Some figures stand out, like Gustavo Gutiérrez (Peru), Leonardo Boff (Brazil), Camilo Torres (Colombia), Ernesto Cardenal (Nicaragua), Jean-Bertrand Aristide (Haiti), Fernando Lugo (Paraguay), Oscar Arnulfo Romero (Salvador), Sergio Méndez Arceo and Samuel Ruíz García (Mexico).

TL's point of departure is the concrete analysis of reality and the historical processes that bring about that reality, but always on a theological level. Franz Hinkelammert notes that TL considers poverty as the "denial of mutual recognition between subjects" and that a society with poor people is a society without God.

"This absence of God, however, is present wherever someone cries. The absence of God is present in the poor. The poor are the presence of the absent God. It is a matter of a visible case of negative theology, in which the presence of God – an effective presence – is given by absence, an absence which cries out, and by necessity." [16]

For this reason, the liberation theologians choose to help the poor so they abandon by themselves their state of poverty, which would result in the recognition of all subjects and in building the kingdom of God on earth.

The response of the orthodox currents inside the Vatican and some local governments was immediate: a smear campaign began against the position and work of liberation theologians in which they were accused of being influenced by communist groups and having relations with the guerrillas. Under this reading, the liberation theologians were promoters of hatred and violence, so they were not worthy representatives of the Catholic Church.

In this way there came about throughout Latin America a kind of symbiosis between Marxism and Catholicism. Therefore, the liberation theologians were not interested in being part of the hierarchical structure of the church. Their work was more focused on the social organization, working with the poor and with the proletariat.

As the debate went beyond the discursive and intellectual level, in their practice the religious critics continued their grassroots work with the "poor and oppressed." Alongside the episcopal meetings, in Latin America the movement formed by Base Ecclesiastical Communities (CEB, as per the Spanish acronym) was gaining strength, and

they found in Brazil and Nicaragua a space of reference. Some expressions of this movement even became political parties.



In Mexico the CEB mainly found wide acceptance among the most marginalized sectors of society. In this regard, Miguel Concha said that “the CEB in Mexico originate in the poorest rural and city areas, among those who suffer a socio-political and economic reality of exploitation, hunger, repression, and misery. Its main actors are the indigenous and the campesinos, the workers, the underemployed and unemployed who – accompanied by pastoral workers, priests, religious and lay people, whose life is devoted to the preferential option for the poor — have discovered in the CEB Movement the seed of hope in the Church of Latin America in general and Mexico in particular.” [17]

The work methodology of the members of the Base Ecclesiastical Communities includes five elements, which are highly descriptive of the dialectical relationship between thinking and doing:

- **To see.** To be aware of what is happening, to have contact with reality, and to analyze it with “collective and individual eyes.”
- **To think.** In the light of the Word of God and the guidance of the Church, to pronounce a judgment of faith about what is SEEN (first step) and to develop evangelical action plans.
- **To act.** To carry out what was planned, with global vision and local action – articulated, organized – based on a community project.
- **To evaluate.** To assess the achievements, understand the failures, learn from the path taken and redirect actions.
- **To celebrate.** It is in the celebration of faith and community celebration where we thank the presence of God in our journey and prepare to carry on.

The CEBs and the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas – with Samuel Ruíz Garcia at its head – played an important role in the indigenous communities. For example, they actively participated in the convening and undertaking of the First Indigenous Congress in 1974. Reproducing the resolutions of the Conference of Medellín, the religious people began to impress on the indigenous the idea that the kingdom of God had to be expressed on earth and that it would have to be based on justice and truth. The work of

the diocese strengthened the internal organization of indigenous peoples and allowed them to build networks of contacts with similar organizations in the state, in Mexico and the world.

However, as happened with the Forces of National Liberation, the work of the diocese also saw itself overturned by the particular cosmivision of the indigenous peoples, to the degree that a kind of “indigenous church” began to form, composed of 2,608 communities with 400 pre-deacons and 8,000 catechists, which, although they coordinated with the structure of the diocese, also had a certain autonomy.

During the phase of the “accumulation of forces in silence” of the EZLN, a large number of militants were found among Indians who had worked with the CEBs and the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Not that their integration was planned, but it happened that the work Samuel Ruíz had led in indigenous communities became the ideal prelude to the political work which was later developed by the neo-Zapatistas. Thus, many of the indigenous who had been pre-deacons and catechists of the “indigenous church” also chose to join the ranks of the EZLN.

As we have seen throughout these three installments, behind the EZLN that declared war on the Mexican army on January 1, 1994 there lies a complex web of political and cultural visions that intertwined to highlight a reality of oppression and exploitation towards a large section of society. It is not only a struggle for indigenous peoples – if we look closely at the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle we will not find a single mention of them – their struggle is much broader, it is “for the Mexican people.”

The struggles against colonialism and conquest, the struggles to make Mexico a free, independent, and sovereign nation, and the struggles against capitalism in its imperialist form are the historical substance of the indigenous rebellion which shocked the world and inspires – even today – great sympathy.

Thus, the EZLN can be understood as a movement calling for a national liberation which makes possible a fair and equitable development. But their struggle is also to make Mexico into a democratic nation, putting an end to the “one-party dictatorship” which ruled this country for more than 70 years, and is now back in government.

There is also much new about the neo-Zapatistas. We will mention just one aspect, of great importance: their struggle is not to seize state power and then establish a socialist or communist regime, as happened in most of the countries of Latin America and the world where there were armed rebellions. On the contrary, their first demands were merely demands for the minimum necessary for the development of a decent life: “work, land, shelter, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace.”

Seen in this way, we can say that the EZLN is a synthesis, a social process which manages to bring together a wide range of social demands, traditions of struggle, and currents of critical thought present throughout the history of Mexico and the world. At the same time it recovers new approaches relevant to their times. For these reasons, today, 30 years after its formation and almost 20 since its first public appearance, after intense and varied processes, of rebuilding and building history; there are many of us, throughout the world, who are still shouting ‘Long Live the EZLN!’

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Notes:

- [1] Galeano, E. (1995) "El desafío. Mensaje enviado al Segundo Diálogo de la Sociedad Civil". En Clajadep, Red de divulgación e intercambios sobre autonomía y poder popular ("The Defiance. Message sent to the Second Dialogue with Civil Society").
- [2] An earlier version of this section was published in 2012 in the digital newspaper *Rebelión*. The version published here contains new items.
- [3] Hobsbawm, E. (1995) *The age of extremes: The short twentieth century, 1914-1991*. London: Abacus.
- [4] Castellanos, L. (2008) *México armado 1943-1981*. México: Ediciones Era, p. 244.
- [5] Castellanos, L. (2008), *op cit.*, p. 247.
- [6] Cf. Morquecho, G. (2011) "La Garrapata en el Chuncerro, cuna del EZLN" ("The Tick in el Chuncerro, cradle of the EZLN"). [Online; Spanish only]. In: Latin American Information Agency, 15 November. Available at: <http://alainet.org/active/50889&lang=es> [Accessed 13 November 2012].
- [7] Le Bot, Y. (1997) *Subcomandante Marcos. El sueño zapatista. Entrevistas con el Subcomandante Marcos, el mayor Moisés y el comandante Tacho, del Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Subcomandante Marcos. The Zapatista dream: Interviews with Subcomandante Marcos, Major Moisés and Comandante Tacho, from the Zapatista Army of National Liberation). México: Plaza & Janés, p. 123.
- [8] *Ibid*, p. 137-138.
- [9] *Ibid*, p. 151.
- [10] SCI Marcos (2002) "Rendirse no existe en lengua verdadera". En *Relatos del Viejo Antonio*. México: Centro de Información y Análisis de Chiapas, pp. 25-26 ("Giving up does not exist in the true language." In *Tales of Old Antonio*.)
- [11] Scott, J. (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Yale University Press, 1990
- [12] *Ibid*, p. 184.
- [13] García de León, A. (2002) *Resistencia y utopía. Memorial de agravios y crónica de revueltas y profecías acaecidas en la provincia de Chiapas durante los últimos quinientos años de su historia*. (Resistance and Utopia. Memorial of grievances and chronicle of revolts and prophecies occurring in the province of Chiapas during the last five hundred years of its history.) Mexico, Ediciones Era.
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