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between communities in rebellion and national and international civil society will be the responsibility of the boards. It is an ambitious move to build institutions of self-government and establish an alternative legal system that are central components of any autonomy project.

What is being born in the jungles and mountains of Chiapas has nothing to do with building a bridge between the rebellion and the traditional political class. That bridge has been burned by the arrogance of power. A huge chasm separates the world of formal politics from ever-more-important parts of Mexican society. Above, without regard to the colors of the party to which they belong, the professionals of power conspire, pose for pictures, make deals with big money, and prepare for power to change hands. Below, the invisible make life, forge identities, resist, and take control of their destiny.

Zapatismo has sketched out a new geography. La Realidad, that little village in the Lacandon jungle, is today on the map of world resistance.

The besieged have become the seizers.

ferent from the previous one. Recognition as peoples and the right to exercise self-determination andautonomy has been for many years a central demand of indigenous peoples. This demand, recognized initially by the Mexican state in the San Andres Accords on February 16, 1996, remained unsatisfied after the disappointing constitutional reform approved by Congress in 2001. With the creation of the Boards of Good Government, the Zapatistas have instituted both the national indigenous demand and the commitments agreed on with the government.

The free township was one of the main rallying cries of Emiliano Zapata's peasant movement. Their cry of "Long live the people, down with haciendas!" was call to recuperate the land and territory taken from them by both the liberals and the conservatives. The township and the regional association of various townships has been for decades the political space that many indigenous peoples have used to preserve their normative systems, traditional forms of election, and cultural identity. Indeed, this practice caused the governmental institutions to assume a "hybrid" form of operation–half constitutional and half indigenous in many townships.

The autonomous townships and the Good Government Boards reinvent these two historic traditions from their own experience and according to the Zapatista world view. They are simultaneously an ideal and a reality. The Caracoles are an institution and the premonition of a different society. The representatives chosen for the Boards of Good Government have broad but precise mandates from their constituents, and can be revoked if they do not carry out the decisions of the assemblies. They relyon the collaboration of the traditional authorities or of the elders' councils, thus mixing the new and the centuries-old and renovating ways of thinking about and applying indigenous normative systems in their communities. Their jurisdiction includes justice, agrarian matters, health, education, and the civil registry (births, deaths, and marriages). From now on, a very important part of relations



> "Zapatismo is not a new political ideology or a rehash of old ideologies. Zapatismo is nothing, it doesn't exist. It only serves as a bridge, to cross from one side to the other. So everyone fits within Zapatismo, everyone who wants to cross from one side to the other. Everyone has his or her own side and other side. There are no universal recipes, lines, strategies, tactics, laws, rules or slogans. There is only a desire: to build a better world, that is, a new world."
>
> – The Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous General Command of the EZLN.

## I) Masters of Their Words

In certain offenses, the victims cannot testify in their own behalf because no-one will listen to them. In this context, the Zapatista rebellion is from the outset an act of justice–the initial reparations of a crimewhere the affected can finally speak and the world must listen. Its voice touched lives, imaginations, experiences, and political conceptions and by doing so broke down the walls that segregated Indian peoples and other peoples from the right to communicate to others the offences suffered.

The rebels opened the doors to dialogue. And they did this without renouncing their language. The rebellion rejected the vocabulary of power and created its own language. In an age of confusion and perplexity, it took up the task without asking permission and said something different from what had already been said. Zapatismo simultaneously won the right to speak and recognition of the legitimacy of its discourse.

Faced with the pretension of the neoliberal story as unalterable, the Zapatistas said new things in a novel way. Zapatismo gave itself the right to courageously name the intoler-

able, and by doing that gavenew birth to hope, and produced sense where before had been only noise. Zapatismo became the masterof its own terminology; it made the language respond to new necessities. It facilitated the conversion ofthe act of naming problems and solutions into a collective and common process. It broadened the horizon for actions that were at once global, just, and radical. It renewed aspirations of freedom that had been closed off; reformulating questions on how to transform the world. It anticipated events and replanted political certainties.

Erupting at a time when grassroots dynamism was weak, the rebellion today animates a grand cause and forms part of the real movement of society–reanimating the left so it is no longer just a world of ideas and dogmatic struggles. For the past ten years it has stirred our passions, our language, and our communication. Its alphabet stimulates the creation of community; its grammar helps forge a shared identity. Zapatismo today is one of the languages of resistance.

From the start, the rebellion explained itself and needed no translators. Rather than depending on doctrine tied to repetition and the conservation of existing meanings, it formulated its own way of thought, closely linked to its political practice. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) introduced a language fed by the reality of its social base. It configured an ideological, ethical, linguistic, and cultural horizon all its own.

In the creation of a new vocabulary, the rebellion also produced a new iconography. Images travel faster than words, and before their voice was heard in the first communiqués, images proved the social composition and origin of the uprising: broad, community-based, and indigenous.

Later, adding to the words, came the photographs, videos, T-shirts, postcards, and posters that told the other history as political drama, as a demonstration of ways of being, as expressions of solidarity, as symbols of irreverence. Indians are



uprooting, atomization, loss of the meaning of life, racism, and exclusion. Their countries had been converted into modern Towers of Babel populated by migrants who work with no social networks to protect them and divided by deep chasms of social resentment and insecurity.

Many of the young people from developed countries who traveled to Chiapas during the past ten years to live in rebel communities–referred to by some in the traditional left with disdain as "ear-ringers" (aretudos)–later became key figures in the network of networks of the global justice constellation. They have forged a new concept of politics and the political, very close to that of the Zapatista rebellion and resistance. For this new generation the traditional vision of politics has become both unacceptable and intolerable. The Zapatista example, under many names, has germinated in the diversity of countercultural movements and expressions in different latitudes. Far from being a relic of the past, Zapatismo has turned out to be (as demonstrated in Cancun and Bolivia) a social laboratory that anticipates the direction and the nature of resistance against neoliberal globalization.

## V) The Commune of the Lacandon Jungle

On August 8, anniversary of the birth of Emiliano Zapata, the Zapatista rebellion established a new constituent power. It is a founding power, born from below, that reproduces over time, questions the chain of command and obedience, and rejects the humiliation inflicted by racism. It is the Lacandon Commune, the Zapatista Boards of Good Government.

The Boards of Good Government (Caracoles) were created to coordinate the more than thirty autonomous townships-in-rebellion in five regions of the territory controlled by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. They take the struggle of Indian peoples for recognition to a new level, radically dif-

is affirmed. The evolution is similar to what workers went through and what women are currently doing.

It is a struggle for full citizenship based on the conviction of being equal to the rest and having the same rights and obligations. It is simultaneously a struggle for dignity and against racism, a process of rejecting exclusion, where concrete demands go beyond a state-client relationship to demanding rights. It also affirms that collective struggle is the way to attain individual rights, always recognizing difference. This supposes accepting the right to exercise different forms of authority and to reaffirm collective entities with their own rights. It demands the right to equality and a different exercise of that.In the heart of this proposal is the struggle for self-determination, with the demand for autonomy being an expression of that struggle.

Indian peoples have become already an autonomous political actor with their own proposals. This is an irreversible process and a significant advance toward a just society. They claim a new way of organizing political institutions that allows them to overcome their exclusion. By doing so, they strengthen the pluralism that the centralized state denies. This is possible because their identity has been profoundly transformed and more and more they identify as peoples rather than populations.

Simultaneously, in South America the Mexican rebellion foretold the exhaustion of the traditional political class and the limits of institutional action. The Argentine crowd's cry "Out with everyone!" was in many ways announced in the "Enough already!" (Ya Basta) of January 1994. Since then, country by country, governing elites have been collapsing.

The language of the Zapatistas struck deep in the heart of many European and U.S. youth. Its call affected them not because these young people "had it all" and looked to Southeast Mexico as their way of playing revolution, but because they saw it as a way to confront what they themselves were experiencing–precarious job markets, unemployment,



no longer seen as before 1994. The images endure and recreate the object represented.

The rebellion unleashed the power of the image that expresses the fundamental fact of resistance. It makes it impossible to reduce to folklore the picture of unarmed indigenous women confronting the Army. The image negates the pitying view of indigenous communities through graphic documents that attest to their dignity against repressive forces. The image impedes blocking out the appearance of the invisible, no longer just governmental statistics but figures instantly identified by the red bandannas covering their faces. It frustrated attempts to trivialize this epic movement of the voices from below by making it out as a marginal protest by some species of social archeology opposed to modernity. But the words also created images–stories that, although they have never been painted, have turned outto be exuberant, lasting, and convincing. Many of these representations are landscapes and characters of an almost mythical nature. The foliage of the Lacandona, Durito, el Viejo Antonio (Old Man Anthony), the Ancient Gods, the Snail–all became part of the social imagination as symbols of identity of the rebellion that have every bit as much force as flesh-and-blood characters.

The rebellion has known how to manage its weaknesses and built the image of its own reasons. Its capacity to send messages is full of ingenuity. The resistance is also a media event.

## II) Revolution, Rebellion, and Insurgency

"Men at sometimes are masters of their fates: The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves," writes William Shakespeare in Julius Caesar. On January 1st, 1994 campesinos and Indians in Chiapas rejected the designs of the stars and burst out violently to govern their own destiny. With the background of a profound agrarian conflict with no immediate

prospect of solution, the proliferation of indigenous demands challenging a regional system of archaic dominion broke open the political arena. They shook off their conventional representatives and fixed a point of departure to create a new regime that today after ten years takes the form of the autonomous municipalities and in the "Boards of Good Government."

These Zapatista campesinos and Indians are the heirs, standard bearers of la bola–that conglomerate of classes, fractions of classes, and action groups that coalesced during the Mexican Revolution of 1910–17. La bola is the name given to the multitude during the Revolution, and refers to the mobilization of the small communities in the armed uprising.

The rebels did not seek to take power and said so from the first moment, although no-one wanted to listen to them and many still do not hear them. In the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, they called for the people to depose the usurper that took control of the federal government through fraud (Carlos Salinas de Gortari), and convoked other powers to take charge of the situation. Simultaneously, they presented themselves as a movement against oppression and for the liberation of the people, and carried a program of historic demands that remain unfulfilled.

The essayist Tomás Segovia has pointed out that what is profoundly original about Zapatismo is that anarmed rebellion has faithfully retained the character of a social protest and not of a political revolution. This protest questions the legitimacy of power itself. The EZLN has avoided ideological rigidity, or converting itself into a political party and being trapped in the web of the political institutions.

The rebellion is rooted in the sovereignty of society, and refuses to recognize intermediaries in exercising that sovereignty. It is an expression of a society that reflects on itself and on its destiny, that creates its own norms and by doing so, institutes itself.



and its radical sectors, a revival of the deep yearning for freedom that had been temporarily anesthetized. Also because it responded with originality and innovation to a proposal for a form of globalization that does not respect differences and that believes modernity can best be built by throwing out large parts of humanity.

Zapatismo illuminated the emergence of a new political actor in Latin America : Indian peoples. Not that the indigenous struggle didn't exist before on the continent. Like in Mexico , the cause of the original peoples was a reality before the uprisings in Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Guatemala, Chile, Nicaragua, and Colombia. Born in the most remote corners, an expression of an intolerable situation, the cause gestated in the mountains well before the Zapatistas brought its message and presence to the political heart of their nations. But Zapatismo gave it a visibility it had not had before, showed its transforming potential. The resentment accumulated in ethnic groups after decades of exclusion and oppression found in the EZLN rebellion a significant point of reference.

Ethnic-based movements have a long history. They have survived the backlashes caused by stirring up national political waters. Contrary to the immediacy of the economic battles of the popular sectors, Indian demands for recognition and dignity stand the test of time. Having waited all these years to express themselves, they are not willing to fade out soon. Indigenous movements express the possibility of an alternative modernity.

The new indigenous movement that arose from the convergence of a pacifist movement and armed Zapatismo demands a new form of insertion in public spaces. Just how and when remains a complicated and unequal process, based on overcoming the exclusion created by integrationist politics that denied difference. From a first phase in which indigenous peoples demanded equality, they passed to a second in which difference

ing of the World Trade Organization in Cancun. In Bolivia a month later, an indigenous uprising toppled a government of businessmen that sought to sell off the natural resources of the people.

Cancun is a critical point in the mobilizations against neoliberal globalization inaugurated by the demonstrations in Seattle in November of 1999. For nearly four years, mass actions have mobilized in the North to protest the effort to write a constitution at the service of huge transnational companies. Bolivia is another link in the popular mobilization that for the past ten years has pulled down corrupt and elitist presidents in Brazil, Peru, Paraguay, Ecuador, and Venezuela. It is an example of resistance led by self-organized Indian peoples and grassroots groups in the region. Cancun and Bolivia are moments of a cycle of struggles that in large part was initiated by the EZLN. Many of the characteristics of grassroots resistance to neoliberalism shown in these two places were debuted in the uprising of the Mexican indigenous peoples and their subsequent political initiatives, from the Meeting for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism in 1996, to the "Color of the Earth" March in 2001, and the establishment of the Boards of Good Government in 2003. Although not all aspects stem from Zapatismo, many of the keys that explain the battle of Cancun and the Bolivian uprising can be found there.

When the Mexican rebels rose up in arms ten years ago, many analysts called the uprising an anachronism. Some saw it as a late expression of the armed struggles in Central America , or as a prehistoric backlash of a group of intellectuals that hadn't heard of the "End of History." A decade later it is clear that the uprising was the first rebellion against the disorder of globalization of the twenty-first century. Not only for having used tools of the Internet to transmit its message internationally and break out of the military encirclement, but also because it marked a point of inflection in the renovation of the global left, a dike against the drainage of social democracy



Zapatismo, then, is a rebel force rather than a revolutionary one. The revolutionary seeks to take power from above to transform society. The rebel, on the contrary, seeks to question and erode power, and refuses to obey authority from above. However, this definition does not deny the social and political transformation that the rebellion has produced. This has come on the heels of a violent uprising of the masses to build a government of its own destiny, which is one of the classic definitions of a revolution.

The rebellion is also an insurgent movement, an expression of those who have collectively declared themselves against the authorities and struggle against them. Despite Zapatismo's refusal to constitute arevolutionary vanguard, it is a founder of new values. "We say that our duty is to initiate, follow, accompany, find and open spaces for something and for someone, including ourselves." These spaces are also in the broadest sense of the word, values. They embody a growing sentiment: the vigilance of fundamental rights and values against the violations of the present system. Insurgents do not always finish a movement they start, but they remain in history as actors of founding processes. Whether the insurrection lasts or is squelched, nothing remains as before. Mentalities have changed, new horizons have opened up, everyone suddenly sees realities that nobody saw before. Whatever the final destiny of the Zapatista insurrection, its role in fermenting new forms of seeing social change has been permanently established.

## III) Resistance and Utopia

Zapatismo does not aim to occupy government or take power; it confronts power and resists it. It is not an opposition party, it does not speak their language, it does not move in the terrain of traditional political institutions. Because it is not a party, it

does not seek to substitute one team of government for another, and refuses to behave itself according to the rules of the game of power like opposition parties do. The opposition opposes a government but not power, while the rebellion opposes power and rejects the current rules of the game.

The rebels are another player that instead of moving the chess pieces of institutional politics, checkmates adversaries by upsetting the table. The rebels resist and organize resistance. They are the player that makes civil disobedience not the act of a hero but a collective resource. The one who rejectstraditional politics or the political class not because they reject politics but, as they have said, "this way of doing politics."

The rebellion resists, and in doing so affirms its potency, its capacity for invention, for producing sense.It defends the rights and values that power tramples, represses, and denies. It resists, from its singularity, the proposals of social formatting from the constituted order. It resists the injustice that exists. It survives and resists simultaneously, and assumes an attitude coherent with the age it lives in; itresists and encourages Utopia. Resists and reconquers life. "Death to death, long live life," proclaimed the Zapatistas last January first in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

The resistance anticipates the possibility of carrying out another kind of political and program. Far from rejecting the possibilities of profound social transformation, it makes it possible. That this politicsdoes not exist fully today does not mean it will never exist. Its presence is contained in the resistance around the world. Emancipation constitutes the only viable foundation of politics today–whereas neoliberalism is patently part of a moribund framework of politics that is deepening a crisis of civilization. These acts of resistance are not the outgrowth of an inherited doctrine, but rather give life to strong values and principles lived out in a new way of acting and thinking. They do not try to changethings by pushing their proposal but by underscoring their capacity for doing. They not only think



change, they live it. They distinguish their struggle from their objectives.

Responses to the Zapatistas' theoretical proposals should be sought in practice. They're the product of specific experience, reflection on the reality they move in, and not the result of prior ideologies. They come from a new social and political actor.

Zapatismo has simultaneous roots in local conditions and a planetary perspective. The struggle against neoliberalism, the value of the community, the recognition of collective creation, the demand for identities, the defense of nature, the liberation of women and international solidarity are part of its storehouse. It emerges from the convergence of various social processes and political currents. Among the ingredients of this mix are Indian utopias, the agrarian struggle inspired by the original Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, the movement of Che Guevara, and the liberation theology of progressive Catholics, and especially Indian theology. The result is, however, different than any of them.

For years the Mexican left has had a schizophrenic discourse. Its words and deeds do not correspond to each other. It defends radical proposals but develops narrow sectoral and economic practices. It raises the banner of full citizenship but deals in corporatist politics. It defends moral renovation but is guided by opportunistic pragmatism. Zapatismo overcomes this division by building a proposal that responds to practice, links to an ethic, and recognizes its own contradictions. Its thought is in synchrony with its living.

## IV) Zapatismo as a Foreshadowing of Things to Come

Cancun and Bolivia . Two points on the map that synthesize the paths traveled by the grassroots movement against neoliberalism in 2003. In September, mass protests derailed the meet-