

What Does it Mean to Live? Notes from the Zapatistas' First International Gathering for Women in Struggle

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By the [Kilombo Women's Delegation](#)**

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Far from mainstream media coverage but at the heart of the autonomous organization of women's struggle on the continent, the First International Gathering of Politics, Art, Sport, and Culture for Women in Struggle was held in Zapatista territory, Chiapas, Mexico, from March 8-10, 2018. Convoled by the women of the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) and in what turned out to be an event of unexpected and unprecedented size, between 5,000 and 8,000 women, including trans people, from more than 50 countries

traveled to the Zapatista *caracol* [center of autonomous government] of Morelia, joining some 2,000 Zapatista women for three days of events. For the first time ever at a Zapatista gathering, only women were permitted inside the *caracol* while accompanying men (and boys over 12 years of age) camped in the parking lot until the formal closure of the event on the third day.

The gathering celebrated International Women's Day (March 8) and marked a context of accelerating violence against women, which has intensified in Mexico alongside the "War on Drugs." Victims of that "war" continue to mount: by 2015 the official count (likely severely under-estimated) had reached 200,000 dead and over 30,000 disappeared, to which we must add some 1.65 million internally displaced, and 2017 went down as the most violent year since the drug war began. Mexico moved into the top 10 countries worldwide for firearm murders categorized as femicides, with rates in some states at 15 times the global average. As with other violent crimes in Mexico, impunity for femicide hovers above 95% and many crimes against women are passed off as domestic issues or women's own fault.^[i] It is in this context that the Zapatista women proposed that the first agreement to be made at the gathering should be "to continue to live and to struggle."^[ii]

The scope of the organizing effort required for such a gathering is difficult to capture: infrastructure for lodging, bathrooms, showers, food, and transport for thousands of women in the mountainous countryside; security provided by the presence of hundreds of unarmed but impeccably organized *milicianas* [Zapatista women civilian reserves]; the organization of Zapatista health teams, doctors, and an ambulance on standby for emergencies; the unfailing and attentive presence of a delegation of Zapatista women in each of the hundreds of workshops and activities offered by their guests; and dozens of "*Tercios Compas*," the Zapatista media teams—again, all women—running a sophisticated technology platform across multiple stages and dozens of simultaneous events. In addition to this organizational feat, the Zapatista women provided a theoretical framework for women's struggle that is striking in its historical and analytical depth and, it is important to note, not necessarily shared by many of the non-Zapatista women present. But the Zapatistas were clear about their purpose: this was not a gathering for women in general, but for *women in struggle*. As they said during the opening events, "We didn't hold this event so rich women could come boss us around." The lessons demonstrated by the Zapatista women throughout the event are too profound and numerous to summarize, but as women delegated by Kilombo to attend the event on behalf of our larger community, we want to summarize a few things that we learned and that we think could be helpful to women's struggle across the world.



Women's Freedom: Self-expression or Collective Self-organization

As the mountains around Morelia began to echo with women's voices, music, and the sounds of basketball and soccer games, there was a tangible excitement to being part of such an enormous crowd with such a diverse range of activities coordinated across the *caracol*. Within this diversity, what immediately struck our delegation was that many of the workshops proposed and led by non-Zapatista attendees were focused on struggle understood as challenging the limitations imposed on self-expression and the individual female body. These workshops involved, on one hand, a wide variety of ways of using movement, voice, and art in order to heal, honor, or express oneself, and on the other, topics that address (what presenters imagine to be) the realities of the female body including reproductive rights and experiences as well as corporal self-knowledge and self-care.^[iii] While many of these themes certainly must have a central place in any women's struggle, we were concerned by the fact that the sheer number of presentations in this vein came at the expense of struggle understood as a question of structural social transformation. That is, self-expression seemed to come at the expense of questions of collective self-organization, "biological reality" at the expense of political strategy. Please note that we are not saying that these are mutually exclusive emphases; on the contrary, exactly what we want to point out is that it seemed that in the presentations of many attendees, self-expression and the body appeared entirely divorced from the questions of

collective self-organization and structural transformation.

We think the risk in focusing on forms of individual expression is that they can easily remain within the realm of a cathartic and ephemeral release, and that this can stand in for the long, arduous process of building alternatives to a capitalist system that has proven itself adept at accommodating and even manufacturing these forms of release. Think here of the explosion of the self-care industry, yoga, new-age spirituality, and other appropriations of Eastern meditative practices that place a focus on the body and spirit and that in the context of contemporary capitalism only help recuperate us for another day of work. In other words, in this context, practices that might prepare us for struggle and liberation are easily assimilated, increasing our productivity and making us more enthusiastic and flexible participants in our own exploitation. The same could be said for forms of protest that allow for a release of collective energy but leave us little or nothing the day after, except perhaps a new aesthetic of rebellion.

Secondly, we think the risk inherent in the focus on corporal self-knowledge and self-care is that it can delink the necessary understanding and defense of our bodies from the structures that impose corporal controls on us in the first place and mask the reasons why the struggle over “the body” is so central to a project of emancipation to begin with. Here it is helpful to remember that capitalism has made control over women’s bodies compulsory in order to reproduce itself on whatever terms necessary for the system at a given time, whether that is obligatory procreation, forced sterilization, coerced reproduction to produce workers, postponed reproduction in order to work, or generalized sexual objectification. But reclaiming our bodies in this context is not about gaining control over our individual bodies—that particular understanding has only led us into a reality where some women in some places have been able to gain substantial control over their bodies and reproductive choices, while other women’s bodies are ravaged by poverty, police repression, overwork, and the vulnerability to violence that accompanies a life lacking in resources. This includes those who have had to give up control over their own reproductive life and domestic sphere in order to perform waged labor in someone else’s.

Therefore, while we do not discount the importance of the forms of corporal expression mentioned above, we do think that it is important to recognize that given the total social fragmentation brought by capitalist relations and values, there is very little hope for redemption of the individual body without the construction of a collective body willing to fight for its freedom. Without this protracted process of collective organization, we remain embattled on the terrain of the individual as produced by the system, rather than moving the struggle to a collective terrain where we can begin to create new people with desires and needs far richer than those available to individuals in the current system.

Freedom According to the Zapatistas: From Subjugation to Self-government

It was exactly this creation of new individuals through the process of collective organization that was highlighted in each speech, song, theater piece, and work of art presented by Zapatista women from each of the five zones of Zapatista territory. They began by theorizing the triple oppression they experience under the capitalist system for being poor, being indigenous, and being women, giving a multi-generational account of the indigenous history of colonization, slavery, violence, rape, forced labor, forced marriage, military harassment, and many other forms of violence and repression. It was this context that framed their emphasis on a particular point, articulated most explicitly by *Insurgenta* Erika who was charged with speaking on behalf of all the Zapatista women at the opening ceremony: “The struggle for our freedom as Zapatista women is ours. It’s not the job of men or the system to give us our freedom. On the contrary, the work of the patriarchal capitalist system is to keep us in submission. If we want to be free, we have to conquer our freedom ourselves, as women.”^[iv] With this statement the Zapatistas are not claiming, as we will discuss below, that patriarchy is a concern only for women. Rather, what they are highlighting here is their conviction that nothing other than the actions of the oppressed themselves have ever or will ever move us toward liberation. Building on this point, each of the presentations that followed then laid out their struggle as the EZLN, and as women of the EZLN, to organize themselves and to build a series of autonomous institutions on recuperated lands that would allow them to take collective control over their lives. Here we want to take a step back to look at the creation of that collective, politicized terrain through the history of women’s struggle in the EZLN.

In 1993, on the eve of the Zapatista uprising when the Women’s Revolutionary Law was made public in the EZLN’s first publication, *El Despertador Mexicano*,^[v] it had already been passed and adopted by consensus across the EZLN ranks and by all their community assemblies. The law outlined women’s rights to participate in struggle and hold positions of authority, to choose their partners and control their own reproductive health, to access healthcare and education, and to hold the same rights and responsibilities as men under revolutionary law.^[vi] This framework for women’s rights and role in struggle throughout Zapatista territory reflected the immense organizational work already undertaken by women to create, educate about, and decide upon such a radical shift across a broad social base.

A mere 10 years later, in 2003, the EZLN announced the creation of five *caracolesto* to be the political homes for the newly formed *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* [Good Government Councils] that would provide a third, zone-wide level of self-government for the Zapatista communities and autonomous municipalities. At this time, despite lacking full integration of women into these self-governing bodies,^[vii] it became clear that the EZLN had already achieved an internal revolution of its own: the construction and institution of a community-based, self-governing civilian authority over the rebel army and throughout Zapatista territory, a victory not of women over men in the limited framework of gender, but of the values of

community self-organization and collective self-government over the traditionally masculinist forms of dominance by force and military hierarchy.

Ten years later again, in 2013, the EZLN held the legendary Zapatista Little School in which over 7,000 students from all over the world attended a course given by the EZLN communities themselves under the title “Freedom According to the Zapatistas.”^[viii] One of the four Zapatista textbooks published as part of the course, *Women’s Participation in Autonomous Government*, documented through the Zapatista women’s own accounts their widespread and advanced participation at all three levels of self-government and in the autonomous education and health systems, economic independence built through women’s cooperatives, transformation of the family and social spheres to allow for these shifts in women’s role; and the transformative growth of each of these community institutions to make good health, literacy, political experience, and organizational leadership standard aspects of women’s daily lives.

And then, just five years later and exactly a quarter century after the publication of the Women’s Revolutionary Law, the Zapatista women coordinated across all five zones of Zapatista territory to hold this historic International Gathering for Women in Struggle, demonstrating not just that unparalleled Zapatista power of convocation, but a profound analytical and organizational capacity across the social base (and military ranks) of women in the movement. This is something, they explained, that no one else could grant them nor take away from them, “not god, not man, not a political party, not a savior, not a leader, not a woman leader nor a female boss.”^[ix]

In effect, Zapatista women went from practical slavery under the control of colonial and domestic masters and into the rule of their own Women’s Revolutionary Law and positions within the highest bodies of collective autonomous authority in a matter of decades. It is clear from this history that Zapatista women’s struggle (including the ban on drugs and alcohol in Zapatista territory) has brought about extraordinary, although of course uneven, advances in the protection of women from physical abuse, rape, and other forms of violence. But we think that the Zapatista women have also made clear that these advances were made possible not through avenues of individual expression and protection, but through the struggle to transform their concrete material conditions—in land use, food production, health, education, and conflict resolution—a transformation both generated by and generative of an understanding of self-organization and self-government so deeply socialized across the community base and collective consciousness that it gives rise to unique and constantly evolving forms of practice. Thus, the integrity and strength of any one Zapatista woman reflects the collective organization of all Zapatista women to struggle against the social order of capitalism that structures violence, inequality, and indignity into every

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If on one hand the Zapatista women insisted that women's freedom is women's job to conquer collectively, they also repeatedly emphasized, in presentations by women from each zone, that their struggle was not against men but against the system. *Insurgenta* Erika, again speaking for the intergenerational collective of Zapatista women, elaborated, "You should know that it wasn't always men who exploited me, robbed me, humiliated me, beat me, scorned me, and murdered me. Often it was women. And it still is."^[x]In this sense, while the Zapatista women critique and counter sexist and patriarchal practices at every level of their resistance, their thought and actions help us to see the limitations of those forms of feminism where the imaginary of struggle does not go beyond the displacement of men and the desire to take their place. In other words, they don't confuse overturning their own oppression with upward mobility within the given relations of domination.

We think that in the Zapatista framework there is an understanding of patriarchy not as a women's issue or a men's issue, or even primarily as a gender issue, but rather as a systemic form of domination and inequality that structures all social relations and licenses the domination of men over women, but also of men over other men and women over other women. Here we think it is important to note the parallels between the way that the Zapatista women understand women's struggle and the struggle of Kurdish women within the Kurdish freedom movement.^[xi]In these frameworks, we can see that excising systemic

problems as women's issues is merely a marginalization of the issues that marginalize women. The fact that patriarchy teaches men that their self-worth is tied up in their ability to exercise (and inevitably experience) domination certainly damages women but also debilitates men and society as a whole, corroding from the outset one's external ability to create relationships of non-domination and one's internal ability to participate in a project of thinking and organizing with others. The politics of collective self-organization we are discussing here is so challenging to many men (but not only men) that they can perceive it as self-destruction rather than a social reorganization that could force all of us out of the roles of dominating or being dominated imposed by the capitalist system. We desperately need a politics that destroys these roles rather than rearranging them. Here we see how Zapatista women's struggle can simultaneously articulate the triple oppression they suffer under patriarchal capitalism—as poor, as indigenous, and as women—and at the same time recognize that freedom from such oppression is not specific to women.

Which body?

At the end of the encounter, the Zapatista women put forward three proposals.^[xii] First, they proposed that as women we continue to live and to struggle; this was met with enthusiastic applause and agreement. They then proposed that, due to the fact that not all the women present were in agreement that women's struggle is against the capitalist system, each woman return home to her collective to study, analyze, discuss, and determine whether it is in fact this system that is responsible for women's oppression. This proposal received more solemn applause. Finally, the Zapatista women proposed another women's gathering to be held next year (enthusiastic applause), adding that this gathering should take place not just in Zapatista territory (considerably less applause), but in each place from which the women present came. This third proposal was not just a suggestion to multiply the event, but one tightly woven into the second: the necessity for organized collective bodies that can discuss and determine the cause and form of our subjugation and thus the path and strategy of our struggle. The Zapatista women had just walked us through their own process of doing this, something that for them included an aspect of technical illiteracy—of need to learn to read and write and to speak Spanish in order to participate in a collective struggle across multiple languages. What they are proposing to others is perhaps the much bigger challenge of overcoming a kind of social illiteracy—of needing to learn to think, analyze, discuss, and decide together over our lives.

It seems to us, and the Zapatistas themselves have pointed out,^[xiii] that it is only through this possibility of building a collective—and building a collective analysis—that one can gain a sense of self and therefore orientation on a path of struggle. But in the current system we are offered only weak substitutes for that sense of self. We have been sold many forms of “freeing” ourselves from oppressive conditions that necessarily pass through the process of becoming *somebody*—of achieving recognition or a place in the limelight. These are enticing

forms precisely because so many women and others have been silenced in or erased from our collective consciousness and memory. But those places and lights are not only increasingly fleeting but largely circumscribed and proscribed by and for the system itself. Neoliberal capitalism offers no shortage of opportunities for individual recognition and self-promotion disguised as freedom, and in our current context the result is an abundance of “movement leaders” with social media presence but no community base and performative acts of “opposition” without practical consequence, both of which can be attention-grabbing in the immediate but lack the serious, sometimes tedious, ongoing and unrecognized processes of collective organization and personal sacrifice that by necessity constitute struggle. We think the Zapatistas are showing us a process of becoming, all together, *nobody*, of creating a largely invisible and mostly anonymous social power from below with a far more profound response to exploitation, dispossession, repression, and humiliation than the symbolic and select somebodies permitted by capitalist structures. In the EZLN’s words, “when the powerful refer to others, they disdainfully call them ‘nobody.’ But ‘nobody’ makes up the majority of the planet.”^[xiv]

We must of course protect and respect the individual bodies—women’s and men’s—that are violated in so many different ways through the absurd horrors of the capitalist system. But in that effort the only body that can free us is the social body, constituted by those anonymous acts of collective self-organization capable of birthing a new way of life. Women’s struggle, then, is not a fight for recognition, access, or inclusion in existing structures; it’s an insistence on fighting for a world where neither social relations nor material production are based in the false hierarchies and decaying institutions of the capitalist system. In that sense, as the Zapatista tale goes, “in the world to be made, in contrast to the current one and those that came before and whose creation is attributed to

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On that day that will be night

As dusk set in on the first day's events, we noticed Zapatista women moving in organized lines through various parts of the *caracol*, though in the falling darkness it was hard to make out their ultimate formation. At the end of the evening, they called for a moment of silence for Eloísa Vega Castro, a member of the Baja California support team for the Indigenous Governing Council who was killed in a car accident while accompanying the Council and its spokeswoman, María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, on a tour of that state on February 14, 2018. Across the chilly, starlit mountain valley, the lights went out and two thousand candles went up, held by all of the Zapatista women who had formed, as of almost two hours before, a great ring around the central plaza of the *caracol*. What clearer expression could there be of solidarity in struggle than thousands of organized Zapatista women encircling with all of their discipline, tenderness, and tenacity the thousands more women they had invited to their territory and raising all those tiny flames in memory of another. At the close of the gathering, they offered another message for that moment, in the voice of Zapatista *compañera* Alejandra, worth citing at length:

"On March 8, at the end of our contribution, each of us lit a small flame. [...] That small light is for you. Take it, sister, *compañera*."

When you feel alone.

When you are afraid.

When you feel that the struggle is very hard; when life itself is very hard.

Light it anew in your heart, in your thoughts, in your gut.

And don't just keep it to yourself, *compañera*, sister.

Take it to disappeared women.

Take it to murdered women.

Take it to incarcerated women.

Take it to women who have been raped.

Take it to women who have been beaten.

Take it to women who have been assaulted.

Take it to women who have been subjected to all kinds of violence.

Take it to migrant women.

Take it to exploited women.

Take it to deceased women.

Take it and tell each and every one of them that she is not alone and that you are going to struggle for her; that you are going to struggle for the truth and justice that her pain deserves; that you are going to struggle so that the pain she carries will not be repeated in another woman from any world.

Take it and turn it into rage, courage, and determination.

Take it and unite it with other lights.

Take it and, perhaps, you will come to think that there can be neither justice, truth, nor freedom in the patriarchal capitalist system.

Then, perhaps, we can meet again to set fire to the system.

And perhaps you will be beside us ensuring that no one puts out that fire until only ashes are left.

And then, sister and compañera, on that day that will be night, perhaps we will be able to say together with you:

‘All right, yes, now we are really going to begin building the world we need and deserve.’^[xvi]

[i]For the data cited here as well as additional statistics, see David Agren, “[Mexico maelstrom: how the drug violence got so bad](#),” *The Guardian*, December 26, 2017; Arturo Conde, “[In Mexico, Grieving Parents Call for End to Drug Wars, Legalization](#),” *NBC News*, April 26, 2016; *BBC Monitoring*, “[Mexico’s war on drugs: Arrests fail to drive down violence](#),” January 25, 2018; *Agence France-Presse*, “[Officials: 2017 was Mexico’s most violent year in two decades](#),” December 23, 2017; David James Cantor, “[The New Wave: Forced Displacement Caused by Organized Crime in Central American and Mexico](#),” *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 34–68; The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development: “[Global Burden of Armed Violence 2015: Every Body Counts](#),” May 8, 2015; reports from the Mexican Statistical Institute [INEGI] as reported in *Telesur*, “[State of Mexico Issues Emergency Alert Over Gender Violence](#),” July 9, 2015; and information from Mexico’s National Women’s Institute and the UN Women Agency as reported by *The Guardian*, “[Mexico: murders of women rise sharply as drug war intensifies](#),” December 14, 2017.

[ii]EZLN. March 8, 2018. “[Zapatista Women’s Opening Address at the First International Gathering of Politics, Art, Sport, and Culture for Women in Struggle](#).”

[iii]For the preliminary list of the workshops proposed by attendees, see this [report from the support team](#) for the organization of the gathering.

[iv]EZLN. March 8, 2018. “[Zapatista Women’s Opening Address at the First International Gathering of Politics, Art, Sport, and Culture for Women in Struggle](#).”

[v]For digitized content of the initial *El Despertador Mexicano*, see the [EZLN archive](#).

[vi]EZLN. [Women’s Revolutionary Law](#).

[vii]EZLN. August 21, 2004, “Leer un video Segunda parte: Dos fallas”

[viii]For information on the Zapatista Little School, see the EZLN’s text from March 2013, “Dates and other Details for the Little Zapatista School.”

[ix]EZLN. March 8, 2018. “Zapatista Women’s Opening Address at the First International Gathering of Politics, Art, Sport, and Culture for Women in Struggle.”

[x]EZLN. March 8, 2018. “Zapatista Women’s Opening Address at the First International Gathering of Politics, Art, Sport, and Culture for Women in Struggle.”

[xi]Here we recommend, for example: Abdullah Öcalan, *The Political Thought of Abdullah Öcalan: Kurdistan, Woman’s Revolution and Democratic Confederatism*. Pluto Press 2017; and Brecht Neven and Marlene Schäfers, “Jineology: from women’s struggles to social liberation.” ROAR Magazine, November 25, 2017.

[xii]EZLN. March 10, 2018. “Words of the Zapatista women at the closing ceremony of the First International Gathering of Politics, Art, Sport, and Culture for Women in Struggle in the Zapatista Caracol of the Tzotz Choj Zone.”

[xiii]El Kilombo. 2009. *Beyond Resistance, Everything: An Interview with Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos*.

[xiv]EZLN. March 1, 2003. “Otra Geografía.”

[xv]EZLN. March 1, 2003. “Otra Geografía.”

[xvi]EZLN. March 10, 2018. “Words of the Zapatista women at the closing ceremony of the First International Gathering of Politics, Art, Sport, and Culture for Women in Struggle in the Zapatista Caracol of the Tzotz Choj Zone,” (*emphasis ours*).



**The Kilombo Women's Delegation attended the Women's Gathering in representation of El Kilombo, a community political project in North Carolina dedicated to building counter-institutions to meet our needs for material survival, study and analysis, and a healthy and vibrant community life. You can contact them at elkilombo@riseup.net.

Coordination of the Kurdish Women's Movement: Letter from Kurdish Women's Movement to Spokeswoman of Indigenous

Governing Council

This article was originally published on [Avispa](#).



For María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, representative of the indigenous people of Mexico and the National Indigenous Congress CNI.

First of all, we want to send our deepest respect and revolutionary greetings to our Mexican sister, from the mountains of Kurdistan to the Sierra Madre mountain range beyond the oceans. Despite the rivers, mountains, deserts, valleys, canyons and seas that separate us, we are indigenous sisters and brothers, no matter what part of the world we are in.

With you, we share our struggle, our resistance against occupation and colonialism, and our dream of a free life, and in this sense, we who belong to the Kurdish Liberation Movement declare that we consider the struggle for self-determination, self-administration and self-defense of the indigenous peoples of Mexico organized in the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) as our own struggle, and we support you on the basis of principles of revolutionary solidarity.

Indigenous peoples are the veins through which the most important social and cultural values of humanity have been transmitted, from the first moments of socialization until our times. Without a doubt, no people is superior to another, but at a time when capitalist modernity is trying to destroy every communal value, indigenous peoples are the safeguard

of the social fabric of all humanity. Thousands of years of collective memory resurge in our songs, our rituals, our prayers, our tattoos, our dances and our traditions. And so the struggle for our own identity against the efforts of capitalist modernity to erase the roots and the memory of our peoples becomes the most meaningful of all forms of resistance.

In Latin America, as in Kurdistan, women are leading this resistance. In our countries, which were the cradles for thousands of years of the culture of the mother goddess, we see that women and life, women and freedom, women and land, and women and nature are inextricably related. In Kurdistan, we express this reality in our slogan “Jin Jiyan Azadî,” which means “Women Life Freedom.”

The bodies and souls of women are the reflection of the universe on the land. Thousands of years ago, during the Neolithic Revolution, it was the women, through their social organization, who led in making changes that enabled the cultivation of the land and the beginning of a sedentary life in harmony with nature. That’s why women were the first to be enslaved by the patriarchal state civilization, which arose as a counterrevolution based on domination, exploitation and occupation.

Parallel to the domination of women was the ever more rapid domination of nature. It was through the oppression of the first form of nature that the second came about, transforming both into the pincers that capitalist modernity used to forcefully exert pressure against historical society, with a greater ability to destroy it. Consequently, legitimate resistance arising in pursuit of self-government, self-determination and self-defense represents the greatest possible struggle for freedom.

We in Kurdistan, enlightened by the struggles of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, have developed our own defense against modernist capitalist forces and attacks from the colonialist states that occupy our soil. We want you to know that we continually receive special inspiration from your experiences of self-government, good government and communalism. We hope that our experiences and breakthroughs in the struggle will likewise serve as sources of inspiration for you.

One of the greatest achievements in our movement is the equal participation and representation of women. This was the result of great sacrifices made and intense struggles waged by women, and we finally won equal participation in making all decisions. Not as individuals, but as representatives of the organized, collective will of the Kurdish Women’s Liberation Movement. This is the way we are taking our place in each and every aspect of struggle. With our system of co-presidencies, established from the ground up, we represent the will of women in each and every decision and develop a democratic kind of politics that goes against all patriarchal, traditional forms of politics. But to be able to do this, it was necessary for us to become an organized force once and for all. Being organized is the most important requirement for winning victories. To the extent that we’re organized, we’re capable of resisting the dominant colonialist system and building our own governmental

alternative.

For that matter, organization is our most important arm for self-defense. In the past, many peoples and movements have not been able to attain the hoped-for results because they weren't well enough organized. It wasn't possible to transform some historical moments into great victories precisely due to the lack of organization. We may not have reached an in-depth understanding of the meaning and importance of this fact, but we're now in another stage of struggle. We're obliged to multiply our efforts to heighten our levels of organization in order to take advantage of this new opportunity to triumph - at a time when the modernist capitalist system is going through yet another deep crisis in its most decisive aspects. History demands it of us. You of the National Indigenous Congress have shown that you recognize this reality by declaring the presidential elections in Mexico a key stage in a process that will result in a rise in your levels of organization.

We, of the Kurdish Women's Liberation Movement wish to express our support for your decision, based on the conviction that this goal will be reached and taken to a much higher level, starting with these elections and the strategies developed around them. Our leader Abdullah Öcalan, who has been imprisoned under the harshest of conditions of isolation by the Turkish colonialist state since 1999, made a highly important analysis of this at the end of the twentieth century. Our leader Apo, foresaw that the twenty-first century would be the century of women's liberation if we are able to grow and decide on our manners and mechanisms of organization. The reason for this conclusion was the evident structural crisis of the patriarchal system, which has been based on our enslavement.

The patriarchal system seeks to overcome this crisis by raising the level of attacks against women to the level of a systematic war. By concentrating its attacks against women the world over through different means and methods, the system aims to cut off the road to liberation that we've taken. The murders of women that have reached the level of genocide in your country, and the murders of women leaders in Latin America are the most concrete indicators of this reality. We want you to know that we consider all the women and leaders of indigenous peoples who have been killed by the operative arms of the dominant system as our own martyrs. We are also struggling to make our hopes and dreams reality. Our martyrs never die. We draw force from them, and they are reborn in every struggle we undertake.

In this context, your decision as Mexican indigenous people to name a woman comrade as representative of your will and make her your candidate in the upcoming presidential elections is very significant. As a matter of fact, comrade Marichuy is not only the voice of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, but at the same time, the voice of the women of the world. We want to say that we affirm the importance and value of her candidacy as the representative of peoples denied, women enslaved and thousands of years of ancestral wisdom threatened with disappearance by capitalist modernity.

As the Kurdish Women's Liberation Movement, we declare our support and solidarity with the compañera and the National Indigenous Congress, not only at the moment of this electoral juncture, but in the entire struggle that your movement is pursuing. We know that the results of the elections themselves do not matter, that they are only one of the roads that the indigenous peoples of Mexico have taken in this process at this particular moment of struggle. In this light, the victory is already a fact because the modernist capitalist system feeds off of the division of forces and the disorganization of peoples and societies that it aims to dominate, but you have constructed the terrain for success by forging organized unity.

From this point on, it is important not to lose sight of this goal, which is none other than stronger organization. Your triumph will be our triumph. Our struggle is your struggle. We are the brother and sister people of the mountains that have risen from the same deep waters. Even in our different tongues, we share the same dreams, we fall in love with the same utopia, and we resist for the sake of the same love. From here, we send you all the force necessary in this new stage, we greet you with our most genuine revolutionary feelings, and we embrace you with all our solidarity and comradeship.

Long live the sisterhood of the peoples!

Long live the sisterhood of the people!

Long live revolutionary internationalism!

Women-life-freedom! Jin Jiyan Azadi

Coordination of the Kurdish Women's Movement Komalén Jinén Kurdistan (KJK)

June 7th, 2017

Swearing in of the Indigenous Governing Council and its

Spokeswoman

This is a transcript of the swearing in *ceremony*, which took place on May 28, 2017 at the CIDECI-UNITIERRA in Chiapas, Mexico.



“Compañeras, compañeros, we now ask everyone to please rise. Please remove your hats. We are now going to do the swearing in and take the oath by which we are formally constituting this Indigenous Governing Council for Mexico.

Brother and sister council members, sister spokesperson for the word of this Indigenous Governing Council.

We are in the middle of a war, a cruel war. We need your strength, bravery, determination, intelligence, and above all love, a great deal of love from all of you, to move forward with the purpose and task that we have set for ourselves, for the good of our peoples, for the good of our communities, for the good of this abused, pained, and humiliated country.

Brother and sister council members, sister spokesperson for this council:

Do you swear to uphold the word and the decision of your peoples and communities, fulfilling and struggling for freedom, justice, and democracy, and respecting the seven principles of the National Indigenous Congress?"

"We do."

"Do you swear to care for and respect your peoples, communities, girls, boys, elderly, men and women, our mother earth, our cultures and our languages?"

"We do."

"Do you swear to defend with your life, your thoughts, your hearts and your bodies, our peoples, communities and our mother earth?"

"We do."

"Do you swear to be the spokespeople for the word of our peoples, of the National Indigenous Congress, without lies, duplicity, or betrayal of any kind, remaining steadfastly anticapitalist, below and to the left, constructing rebellion and resistance with all the exploited men and women of this country and this world, against those above, the capitalists and their administrators and overseers, for a world where many worlds fit?"

"We do."

"Finally, do you swear to not fall into the temptation to seek votes and power, to not sell out, not give up, and not give in to those above?"

"We do."

"That is what we demand of you, and if you don't do it, we won't complain or bring suit against you: we will sanction you and remove you. Thank you, *compañeras, compañeros*."

Long live the National Indigenous Congress!"

"Viva!"

"Long live the Zapatista Army of National Liberation!"

"Viva!"

"Long live Mexico!"

“Viva!”

“Long live the anticapitalist and leftist struggle!”

“Viva!”

“Long live our peoples!”

“Viva!”

“Long live Mexico!”

“Viva!”

“Long live the National Indigenous Congress!”

“Viva!”

“Long live the struggle of the exploited men and women of this country and this world!”

“Viva!”

“Thank you *compañeros, compañeras.*”

CNI/EZLN: And the Earth Trembled! A Report From the Epicenter...

This communique was originally published by [Enlace Zapatista](#).



To the Originary Peoples of Mexico:

To Civil Society of Mexico and the World:

To the National and International Sixth:

To the Free Media:

Brothers and Sisters:

This is the time of the originary peoples, the time for us to replant and rebuild ourselves. It is time to go on the offensive and this is the agreement that we have laid out for how to do so, from our perspective as individuals, as communities, as originary peoples, and as the National Indigenous Congress [CNI]. It is time for dignity to govern this country and this world and for democracy, liberty, and justice to flourish in its step.

We are announcing here that during the second phase of the Fifth National Indigenous Congress we meticulously analyzed the results of the consultation process that we held

among our peoples during the months of October, November, and December of 2016. In that process, we issued agreements from communal, *ejidal*, collective, municipal, inter-municipal and regional assemblies in all of the ways, forms, and languages that represent our peoples in the geography of this country, once again bringing us to understand and confront, with dignity and rebellion, the situation that we face in our country and the world.

We appreciate the messages of support, hope, and solidarity that came from intellectuals, collectives, and peoples in response to our proposal entitled “Let the Earth Tremble at its Core,” which we made public during the first phase of the Fifth National Indigenous Congress. We also acknowledge the critical voices, many of them making fundamentally racist arguments, that expressed indignant and contemptuous rage at the idea that an indigenous woman would aspire not only to contend for presidential election, but would propose to truly change, from below, this broken country.

To all of them, we say that the earth indeed has trembled, and we along with her, and that we intend to shake the conscience of the entire nation, and that, in fact, we intend for indignation, resistance and rebellion to be present as an option on the electoral ballots of 2018. But we also say that it is not at all our intention to compete with the political parties or with the political class who still owe this country so much. They owe us for every death, disappearance, and imprisonment, and every dispossession, repression, and discrimination. Do not mistake our intentions. We do not plan to compete against them, because we are not the same as they are. Unlike them, we are not filled with lies and perverse words. We are instead the collective word of below and to the left, that which shakes the world and makes it tremble with epicenters of autonomy, and which makes us so proudly different from them that:

1. While the country is submerged in fear and terror born from the thousands of dead and disappeared, in the municipalities of the mountains and the coast of Guerrero our peoples have created conditions of real security and justice. In Santa María Ostula, Michoacán, the Nahuatl people have united with other indigenous communities to ensure that security remains in the hands of the people. The epicenter of the resistance there is the communal assembly of Ostula, the guarantor of the ethic of a movement that has already permeated the municipalities of Aquila, Coahuayana, Chinicuila, and Coalcomán. In the Purépecha plateau, the community of Cherán has demonstrated that by organizing to eliminate the politicians from their bad government structure and by exercising their own forms of security and government they could not only construct justice, but also, as in other geographies across this country, they showed that only from below, from rebellion, can a new social pact be constructed that is autonomous and just. And we have not and will not stop constructing from below the truth and justice denied to the 43 disappeared students from the teacher’s college of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, the 3 student *compañeros* who were murdered, and their *compañeros* who were injured, all by

the Mexican narco-government and its repressive forces. Meanwhile, all levels of the bad governments criminalize social struggle and resistance and rebellion, persecuting, accusing, disappearing, imprisoning, and murdering the men and women who struggle for just causes.

2. While destruction reaches every corner of the country, knowing no limits and distancing people from their land and from that which is sacred, the Wixárika people, together with the committees in defense of life and water from the *Potosino altiplano*, have shown that they can defend a territory and their environment and can create an equilibrium based in an identification with nature, with a sacred vision that recreates, every day, the ancestral links with life, land, the sun, and the ancestors, reaching across 7 municipalities in the sacred ceremonial territory of Wirikuta in San Luis Potosí.
3. While the bad governments deform State policies on education, placing education at the service of capitalist corporations such that it ceases to be a right, the originary peoples create primary schools, secondary schools, high schools and universities with their own educational systems, based in the protection of our mother earth, in defense of territory, in production, in the sciences, in the arts, and in our languages. Despite the fact that the majority of these processes grow without the support of any level of the bad government, these institutions are meant to serve everyone.
4. Meanwhile, the paid media - spokespeople for those who prostitute every one of the words that they circulate and fool the people in the country and the city so that they don't wake from their slumber - criminalize those who think and defend what is theirs, making them out to be delinquents, vandals, and misfits, while those who benefit from ignorance and alienation are the ones with high social status. Those who oppress, repress, exploit and dispossess are always made out to be the good guys, the ones who deserve to be respected and allowed to govern so that they can serve themselves. While all of this is happening, the communities have made their own media, creating ideas in different ways so that conscience cannot be overshadowed by the lies that the capitalists impose, and instead using them to strengthen organization from below, where every true word is born.
5. While the representative "democracy" of the political parties has been converted into a parody of the popular will, where votes are bought and sold like any other commodity and poverty is used to manipulate people so that the capitalists can maintain the division between the people of the countryside and the city, the originary peoples continue to care for and strengthen their forms of consensus and to cultivate assemblies as organs of government where through the voice of everyone together profoundly democratic agreements are made, across entire regions, through assemblies that articulate with agreements of other assemblies, which themselves emerge from the profound will of each family.
6. While the governments impose their decisions to benefit the few, supplanting the popular will of the people and criminalizing and repressing whoever opposes their projects of death which they impose at the cost of the blood of our peoples—such as the

New Airport of Mexico City, pretending to consult them while actually imposing death—we ordinary peoples have consistent ways and forms for free, prior and informed consent, however small or large that may be.

7. While the bad governments hand energy sovereignty over to foreign interests through privatization, and the high cost of gasoline reveals the face of capitalism which in fact only opens a road toward inequality and the rebellious response of the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of Mexico, the powerful can neither hide nor silence this rebellion. We peoples unite and fight to stop the destruction of our territories through fracking, wind farms, mining, oil wells, and gas and oil pipelines in the states of Veracruz, Sonora, Sinaloa, Baja California, Morelos, Oaxaca, Yucatán and the entire national territory.
8. While the bad governments impose their toxic and genetically modified food on consumers across the countryside and in the cities, the Mayan people continue their indefatigable struggle to stop the planting of genetically modified seed on the Yucatan peninsula and across the country in order to conserve the ancestral genetic wealth that also symbolizes our life and collective organization and is the basis for our spirituality.
9. While the political class only destroys and makes empty promises, we peoples build, not only in order to govern but also in order to exist with autonomy and self-determination.

Our resistances and rebellions constitute the power of below. We don't offer empty promises or actions, but rather real processes for radical transformation where everyone participates and which are tangible in the diverse and enormous indigenous geographies of this nation. This is why, as the National Indigenous Congress, which brings together 43 peoples of this country in this Fifth Congress, WE AGREE to name an Indigenous Governing Council with men and women representatives from each one of the peoples, tribes, and nations that make up the CNI. This council proposes to govern this country. It will have an indigenous woman from the CNI as its spokesperson, which is to say a woman who has indigenous blood and who knows her culture, and this indigenous woman spokesperson from the CNI will be an independent candidate for the presidency of Mexico in the 2018 elections.

That is why we, the CNI, as the Home for All Indigenous Peoples, are also the principles that configure the ethic of our struggle. In these principles there is room for all of the ordinary peoples of this country. Those principles that house the Indigenous Governing Council are:

To obey, not command

To represent, not supplant

To serve others, not serve oneself

To convince, not defeat

To go below, not above

To propose, not impose

To construct, not destroy

This is what we have invented and reinvented, not simply because we want to, but because it is the only way that we have to continue existing - by following new paths forged from the collective memory of our own forms of organization and that are the product of resistance and rebellion, in order to confront, every day, the war that has not ended and yet has not been able to do away with us. Using these forms it has not only been possible for us to build a path toward the full reconstitution of our peoples, but also toward new civilizational forms. In other words, it has been possible to build collective hope that is transformed into communities, municipalities, regions, states, and which is able to respond precisely to the real problems that the country is facing, far away from the political class and their corruption.

From this Fifth National Indigenous Congress, we call on the originary peoples of this country, the collectives of the Sixth, the workers, the coalitions and committees who struggle in the countryside and the city, the students, intellectuals, the artists, and scientists, the elements of civil society that are not organized, as well as all good-hearted people to close ranks and go on the offensive. We call on you to dismantle the power of above and to reconstitute ourselves now from below and to the left, not only as peoples but as a country. We make a call to come together in a single organization where dignity will be our final word and our first action. We call on all of you to organize with us to stop this war, and to not be afraid to build ourselves and sow our seeds on the ruins left by capitalism.

This is what humanity and our mother earth demand of us. It is the time for rebellious dignity. We will make this a material reality by convoking a constituent assembly of the Indigenous Governing Council for Mexico in the month of May 2017. From there we will build bridges toward the *compañeros* and *compañeras* of civil society, the media, and the originary peoples in order to make the earth tremble at its core, to overcome fear and recuperate what belongs to humanity, what belongs to the earth and what belongs to the peoples. We do this so that we can recuperate the territories that have been invaded or destroyed, so that the disappeared of this country can be returned, so that all political prisoners are freed, so that there can be truth and justice for all of those who have been murdered, so that there can be dignity for the countryside and the city. That is, have no doubt, we are going for everything, because we know this might be the last opportunity we have as originary peoples and as Mexican society to peacefully and radically change our

forms of government, making dignity the epicenter of a new world.

From Oventik, Zapatista Territory, Chiapas, Mexico

Never Again a Mexico Without Us

National Indigenous Congress

Zapatista Army for National Liberation

CNI/EZLN: May the Earth Tremble at Its Core

This communique was originally published by [Enlace Zapatista](#).



To the people of the world:

To the free media:

To the National and International Sixth:

Convened for the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the National Indigenous Congress and the living resistance of the originary peoples, nations, and tribes of this country called Mexico, of the languages of Amuzgo, Binni-zaá, Chinanteco, Chol, Chontal de Oaxaca, Coca, Náyeri, Cuicateco, Kumiai, Lacandón, Matlazinca, Maya, Mayo, Mazahua, Mazateco, Mixe, Mixteco, Nahuatl, Ñahñu, Ñathô, Popoluca, Purépecha, Rarámuri, Tlapaneco, Tojolabal, Totonaco, Triqui, Tzeltal, Tsotsil, Wixárika, Yaqui, Zoque, Chontal de Tabasco, as well as our Aymara, Catalán, Mam, Nasa, Quiché and Tacaná brothers and sisters, we firmly pronounce that our struggle is below and to the left, that we are anticapitalist and that the time of the people has come—the time to make this country pulse with the ancestral heartbeat of our mother earth.

It is in this spirit that we met to celebrate life in the Fifth National Indigenous Congress,

which took place on October 9-14, 2016, in CIDECI-UNITIERRA, Chiapas. There we once again recognized the intensification of the dispossession and repression that have not stopped in the 524 years since the powerful began a war aimed at exterminating those who are of the earth; as their children we have not allowed for their destruction and death, meant to serve capitalist ambition which knows no end other than destruction itself. That resistance, the struggle to continue constructing life, today takes the form of words, learning, and agreements. On a daily basis we build ourselves and our communities in resistance in order to stave off the storm and the capitalist attack which never lets up. It becomes more aggressive everyday such that today it has become a civilizational threat, not only for indigenous peoples and *campesinos* but also for the people of the cities who themselves must create dignified and rebellious forms of resistance in order to avoid murder, dispossession, contamination, sickness, slavery, kidnapping or disappearance. Within our community assemblies we have decided, exercised, and constructed our destiny since time immemorial. Our forms of organization and the defense of our collective life is only possible through rebellion against the bad government, their businesses, and their organized crime.

We denounce the following:

1. In Pueblo Coca, Jalisco, the businessman Guillermo Moreno Ibarra invaded 12 hectares of forest in the area known as El Pandillo, working in cahoots with the agrarian institutions there to criminalize those who struggle, resulting in 10 community members being subjected to trials that went on for four years. The bad government is invading the island of Mexcala, which is sacred communal land, and at the same time refusing to recognize the Coca people in state indigenous legislation, in an effort to erase them from history.
2. The Otomí N̄hañu, N̄athö, Hui hú, and Matlatzinca peoples from México State and Michoacán are being attacked via the imposition of a megaproject to build the private Toluca-Naucalpan Highway and an inter-city train. The project is destroying homes and sacred sites, buying people off and manipulating communal assemblies through police presence. This is in addition to fraudulent community censuses that supplant the voice of an entire people, as well as the privatization and the dispossession of water and territory around the Xinantécatl volcano, known as the Nevado de Toluca. There the bad governments are doing away with the protections that they themselves granted, all in order to hand the area over to the tourism industry. We know that all of these projects are driven by interest in appropriating the water and life of the entire region. In the Michoacán zone they deny the identity of the Otomí people, and a group of police patrols have come to the region to monitor the hills, prohibiting indigenous people there from going to the hills to cut wood.
3. The originary peoples who live in Mexico City are being dispossessed of the territories that they have won in order to be able to work for a living; in the process they are

robbed of their goods and subjected to police violence. They are scorned and repressed for using their traditional clothing and language, and criminalized through accusations of selling drugs.

4. The territory of the Chontal Peoples of Oaxaca is being invaded by mining concessions that are dismantling communal land organization, affecting the people and natural resources of five communities.
5. The Mayan Peninsular People of Campeche, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo are suffering land dispossession as a result of the planting of genetically modified soy and African palm, the contamination of their aquifers by agrochemicals, the construction of wind farms and solar farms, the development of ecotourism, and the activities of real estate developers. Their resistance against high electricity costs has been met with harassment and arrest warrants. In Calakmul, Campeche, five communities are being displaced by the imposition of 'environmental protection areas,' environmental service costs, and carbon capture plans. In Candelaria, Campeche, the struggle continues for secure land tenure. In all three states there is aggressive criminalization against those who defend territory and natural resources.
6. The Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Chol and Lacandón Maya People of Chiapas continue to be displaced from their territories due to the privatization of natural resources. This has resulted in the imprisonment and murder of those who defend their right to remain in their territory, as they are constantly discriminated against and repressed whenever they defend themselves and organize to continue building their autonomy, leading to increasing rates of human rights violations by police forces. There are campaigns to fragment and divide their organizations, as well as the murders of *compañeros* who have defended their territory and natural resources in San Sebastián Bachajon. The bad governments continue trying to destroy the organization of the communities that are EZLN bases of support in order to cast a shadow on the hope and light that they provide to the entire world.
7. The Mazateco people of Oaxaca have been invaded by private property claims which exploit the territory and culture for tourism purposes. This includes naming Huautla de Jiménez as a "Pueblo Mágico" in order to legalize displacement and commercialize ancestral knowledge. This is in addition to mining concessions and foreign spelunking explorations in existing caves, all enforced by increased harassment by narcotraffickers and militarization of the territory. The bad governments are complicit in the increasing rates of femicide and rape in the region.
8. The Nahua and Totonaca peoples of Veracruz and Puebla are confronting aerial fumigation, which creates illnesses in the communities. Mining and hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation are carried out through fracking, and 8 watersheds are endangered by new projects that are contaminating the rivers.
9. The Nahua and Popoluca peoples from the south of Veracruz are under siege by organized crime and also risk territorial destruction and their disappearance as a people because of the threats brought by mining, wind farms, and above all, hydrocarbon

exploitation through fracking.

10. The Nahuatl people, who live in the states of Puebla, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, Morelos, Mexico State, Jalisco, Guerrero, Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, and Mexico City, are in a constant struggle to stop the advance of the so-called *Proyecto Integral Morelos*, consisting of pipelines, aqueducts, and thermoelectric projects. The bad governments, seeking to stop the resistance and communication among the communities are trying to destroy the community radio of Amiltzingo, Morelos. Similarly, the construction of the new airport in Mexico City and the surrounding building projects threaten the territories around Texcoco lake and the Valle de México basin, namely Atenco, Texcoco, and Chimalhuacán. In Michoacán, the Nahuatl people face the plunder of their natural resources and minerals by *sicarios* [hitmen] who are accompanied by police or the army, and also the militarization and paramilitarization of their territories. The cost of trying to halt this war has been murder, persecution, imprisonment, and harassment of community leaders.
11. The Zoque People of Oaxaca and Chiapas face invasion by mining concessions and alleged private property claims on communal lands in the Chimalapas region, as well as three hydroelectric dams and hydrocarbon extraction through fracking. The implementation of cattle corridors is leading to excessive logging in the forests in order to create pastureland, and genetically modified seeds are also being cultivated there. At the same time, Zoque migrants to different states across the country are re-constituting their collective organization.
12. The Amuzgo people of Guerrero are facing the theft of water from the San Pedro River to supply residential areas in the city of Ometepec. Their community radio has also been subject to constant persecution and harassment.
13. The Rarámuri people of Chihuahua are losing their farmland to highway construction, to the Creel airport, and to the gas pipeline that runs from the United States to Chihuahua. They are also threatened by Japanese mining companies, dam projects, and tourism.
14. The Wixárika people of Jalisco, Nayarit, and Durango are facing the destruction and privatization of the sacred places they depend on to maintain their familial, social, and political fabric, and also the dispossession of their communal land in favor of large landowners who take advantage of the blurry boundaries between states of the Republic and campaigns orchestrated by the bad government to divide people.
15. The Kumiai People of Baja California continue struggling for the reconstitution of their ancestral territories, against invasion by private interests, the privatization of their sacred sites, and the invasion of their territories by gas pipelines and highways.
16. The Purépecha people of Michoacán are experiencing deforestation, which occurs through complicity between the bad government and the narcoparamilitary groups who plunder the forests and woods. Community organization from below poses an obstacle to that theft.
17. For the Triqui people of Oaxaca, the presence of the political parties, the mining industry, paramilitaries, and the bad government foment the disintegration of the

community fabric in the interest of plundering natural resources.

18. The Chinanteco people of Oaxaca are suffering the destruction of their forms of community organization through land reforms, the imposition of environmental services costs, carbon capture plans, and ecotourism. There are plans for a four-lane highway to cross and divide their territory. In the Cajono and Usila Rivers the bad governments are planning to build three dams that will affect the Chinanteco and Zapoteca people, and there are also mining concessions and oil well explorations.
19. The Náyeri People of Nayarit face the invasion and destruction of their sacred territories by the Las Cruces hydroelectric project in the site called Muxa Tena on the San Pedro River.
20. The Yaqui people of Sonora continue their sacred struggle against the gas pipeline that would cross their territory, and in defense of the water of the Yaqui River, which the bad governments want to use to supply the city of Hermosillo, Sonora. This goes against judicial orders and international appeals which have made clear the Yaqui peoples' legal and legitimate rights. The bad government has criminalized and harassed the authorities and spokespeople of the Yaqui tribe.
21. The Binizzá and Ikoot people organize to stop the advance of the mining, wind, hydroelectric, dam, and gas pipeline projects. This includes in particular the Special Economic Zone on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and the infrastructure that threatens the territory and the autonomy of the people on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec who are classified as the "environmental Taliban" and the "indigenous rights Taliban," the precise words used by the Mexican Association of Energy to refer to the Popular Assembly of the Juchiteco People.
22. The Mixteco people of Oaxaca suffer the plunder of their agrarian territory, which also affects their traditional practices given the threats, deaths, and imprisonment that seek to quiet the dissident voices, with the bad government supporting armed paramilitary groups as in the case of San Juan Mixtepec, Oaxaca.
23. The Mixteco, Tlapaneco, and Nahuatl peoples from the mountains and coast of Guerrero face the imposition of mining megaprojects supported by narcotraffickers, their paramilitaries, and the bad governments, who fight over the territories of the original peoples.
24. The Mexican bad government continues to lie, trying to hide its decomposition and total responsibility for the forced disappearance of the 43 students from the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers College in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero.
25. The state continues to hold hostage: *compañeros* Pedro Sánchez Berriozábal, Rómulo Arias Mireles, Teófilo Pérez González, Dominga González Martínez, Lorenzo Sánchez Berriozábal, and Marco Antonio Pérez González from the Nahuatl community of San Pedro Tlanixco in Mexico State; Zapotec *compañero* Álvaro Sebastián from the Loxicha region; *compañeros* Emilio Jiménez Gómez and Esteban Gómez Jiménez, prisoners from the community of Bachajón, Chiapas; *compañeros* Pablo López Álvarez and the exiled Raul Gatica García and Juan Nicolás López from the Indigenous and Popular Council of

- Oaxaca Ricardo Flores Magón. Recently a judge handed down a 33-year prison sentence to *compañero* Luis Fernando Sotelo for demanding that the 43 disappeared students from Ayotzinapa be returned alive, and to the *compañeros* Samuel Ramírez Gálvez, Gonzalo Molina González and Arturo Campos Herrera from the Regional Coordination of Community Authorities - PC. They also hold hundreds of indigenous and non-indigenous people across the country prisoner for defending their territories and demanding justice.
26. The Mayo people's ancestral territory is threatened by highway projects meant to connect Topolobampo with the state of Texas in the United States. Ambitious tourism projects are also being created in Barranca del Cobre.
 27. The Dakota Nation's sacred territory is being invaded and destroyed by gas and oil pipelines, which is why they are maintaining a permanent occupation to protect what is theirs.

For all of these reasons, we reiterate that it our obligation to protect life and dignity, that is, resistance and rebellion, from below and to the left, a task that can only be carried out collectively. We build rebellion from our small local assemblies that combine to form large communal assemblies, *ejidal* assemblies, *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* [Good Government Councils], and coalesce as agreements as peoples that unite us under one identity. In the process of sharing, learning, and constructing ourselves as the National Indigenous Congress, we see and feel our collective pain, discontent, and ancestral roots. In order to defend what we are, our path and learning process have been consolidated by strengthening our collective decision-making spaces, employing national and international juridical law as well as peaceful and civil resistance, and casting aside the political parties that have only brought death, corruption, and the buying off of dignity. We have made alliances with various sectors of civil society, creating our own resources in communication, community police and self-defense forces, assemblies and popular councils, and cooperatives; in the exercise and defense of traditional medicine; in the exercise and defense of traditional and ecological agriculture; in our own rituals and ceremonies to pay respect to mother earth and continue walking with and upon her, in the cultivation and defense of native seeds, and in political-cultural activities, forums, and information campaigns.

This is the power from below that has kept us alive. This is why commemorating resistance and rebellion also means ratifying our decision to continue to live, constructing hope for a future that is only possible upon the ruins of capitalism.

Given that the offensive against the people will not cease, but rather grow until it finishes off every last one of us who make up the peoples of the countryside and the city, who carry profound discontent that emerges in new, diverse, and creative forms of resistance and rebellion, this Fifth National Indigenous Congress has decided to launch a consultation in each of our communities to dismantle from below the power that is imposed on us from above and offers us nothing but death, violence, dispossession, and destruction. Given all of

the above, we declare ourselves in permanent assembly as we carry out this consultation, in each of our geographies, territories, and paths, on the accord of the Fifth CNI to name an Indigenous Governing Council whose will would be manifest by an indigenous woman, a CNI delegate, as an independent candidate to the presidency of the country under the name of the National Indigenous Congress and the Zapatista Army for National Liberation in the electoral process of 2018. We confirm that our struggle is not for power, which we do not seek. Rather, we call on all of the originary peoples and civil society to organize to put a stop to this destruction and strengthen our resistances and rebellions, that is, the defense of the life of every person, family, collective, community, or *barrio*. We make a call to construct peace and justice by reweaving ourselves from below, from where we are what we are.

This is the time of dignified rebellion, the time to construct a new nation by and for everyone, to strengthen power below and to the anticapitalist left, to make those who are responsible for all of the pain of the peoples of this multi-colored Mexico pay.

Finally, we announce the creation of the official webpage of the CNI:

www.congresonacionalindigena.org

From CIDECI-UNITIERRA,

Chiapas, October 2016

For the Full Reconstitution of Our Peoples

Never Again a Mexico Without Us

National Indigenous Congress

Zapatista Army for National Liberation

Carlos Gonzales: The National Indigenous Congress, a space of

encounter and unity

Originally published in Spanish by [La Jornada](#).



Thirty years have passed since the creation of the National Council of Indigenous Peoples (*Consejo Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas*) in 1975. Of course, that organization and the supreme councils that constituted it were President Echeverría's idea; their purpose was never to ensure the recognition of any indigenous rights. But once Echeverría's term was over, the inevitable decomposition of that organization followed, as did the formation of critical strands from within it. These critical strands can be considered one of the origins of the new Mexican indigenous movement that over the past fifteen years has struggled for the long-denied constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples.

Around the edges of the aforementioned supreme councils, several very combative nuclei, especially with regard to the defense of indigenous territories, encountered and recognized each other. The National Coordinator of Indian Peoples (*Coordinadora Nacional de Pueblos Indios*) also came out of this process. Important leaders such as Pedro de Haro Sánchez, Aquiles Vargas, and Juan Chávez Alonso, the first two already deceased, experienced that period of rupture.

Some strands of thinking, joined together in the National Coordinator of the Ayala Plan (*Coordinadora Nacional Plan de Ayala*), were able to pioneer a way to distance themselves from the stiff discourse on the Left which diluted the properly indigenous struggle within the peasant struggle. In the 1980s, this growing indigenous movement was invigorated by peasant organizations made up primarily of indigenous people and movements that disputed the municipal power of local strong-man governments, as well as by the serious consideration being given to communality [*comunalidad*] in Oaxaca and the clearly autonomist revindications of the Independent Front of Indian Peoples [*Frente Independiente de Pueblos Indios*].

It was during the 1992 events around the fifth centennial of the so-called "discovery" of America that the indigenous movement reached a greater degree of unity and began constructing its own program of struggle that put autonomy at the center of its demands.

The indigenous uprising by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in January of

1994 shook national society and made the oppression lived by the indigenous peoples of Chiapas and all of Mexico visible to the eyes of the world.

That uprising also allowed indigenous peoples to re-encounter each other and civil society as they never had before, seeking to build a shared resistance that would make possible the long-denied constitutional recognition of their collective rights.

The strength that the EZLN lent to the indigenous movement is multi-faceted. On one hand, the government was forced in February 1996 to sign the San Andrés Accords, committing to national reforms that would constitutionally recognize and grant autonomy to indigenous peoples. On the other hand, following two National Permanent Indigenous Forums in January and July of 1996, the indigenous movement succeeded in founding the National Indigenous Congress (*Congreso Nacional Indígena*) (CNI) in October of that year.

Between 1994 and 1996, the indigenous movement confronted two positions: on one side was the position that defended regional autonomies as one more tier of government; on the other side was the formulation agreed upon in San Andrés regarding the articulation of municipal and community autonomies at whatever level and sphere they could be asserted and exercised. The former position was taken up by those who founded the National Indigenous Plural Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA) in April of 1995; the latter joined the program of the National Indigenous Congress in October 1996.

The CNI, conceived from its origins as the “house of the indigenous peoples of Mexico,” represents the greatest achievement of the national indigenous movement in terms of building its own space. It is this space from which the EZLN and other indigenous organizations carried out multiple actions whose purpose was to demand the incorporation of the San Andrés Accords into the Federal Constitution and which culminated in the “March of the Color of the Earth” between March and April of 2001.

In the end the San Andrés Accords were betrayed by the political parties, which defrauded the movement with the indigenous counter-reform passed on April 28, 2001, as well as by the powers of the Mexican State which did not hesitate to approve and ratify said counter-reform.

Starting with that reform, which not only did not recognize the proposed rights but diminished others already in existence, the perspective taken up by the CNI and the indigenous movement was to refuse to recognize the counter-reform and to exercise via their actions the rights agreed upon at San Andrés.

That is what was agreed upon in the first meetings of the CNI in the Central Pacific Region (RCP) of the country and ratified in the Eighth National Assembly of the CNI. With the

autonomous Zapatista experience as a reference point, an important current of thought has taken shape inside the indigenous movement over the last four years which puts forth for the first time the novel proposal of no longer seeking recognition of indigenous peoples in national legislation, but rather making that recognition and the associated rights real in fact and deed.

ANIPA followed a very different path, deciding to become a participant in official politics which tend towards the destruction of indigenous peoples, and their “struggle” for regional autonomy did not go beyond obtaining a few candidacies and government posts.

We should not be surprised, then, by the federal government-sponsored indigenous assembly held in Chilpancingo in September of 2002 which aimed to reduce the influence of Zapatismo in the national indigenous movement and “replace” the CNI, according to a pact made a few months prior in Tlaxcala. Nor should we be surprised by the early incorporation of several of its leaders into the neoliberal PAN government in 2001, nor by its combativeness against the EZLN and the autonomous municipality of Suljaa’.

More than four years after the “March of the Color of the Earth,” and beyond the divisions that exist in the indigenous movement and the incongruousness of a few leaders, today the CNI as a national space of unity is demobilized, with the exception of the Central Pacific Region which has held 16 sessions over four years of continuous work, always in rural communities embroiled in conflict in order to give visibility to their processes.

But from below, the indigenous movement exists, speaks, and reflects. In the sphere of what has been created in the CNI’s Central Pacific Region, the self-recognized communities there along with many other communities from Chihuahua, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Puebla, and Hidalgo not formally located in that region are organizing workshops, seminars, and meetings in order to understand and counter the multiple privatizations, laws, decrees, and programs with which the government and transnational corporations seek to invade and prey upon indigenous territories. In a loose network of communities, ejidos, organizations, and non-clientelist NGOs, they defend their food sovereignty and the peoples’ territories, their natural and spiritual resources, and the urgency of continuing to make viable their existence as peasants.

Now more than ever it is urgent to seek the unity of the indigenous movement which is organized independently of the State and to think through the viability of a national indigenous space that brings together all the forces which, in the face of the neoliberal disaster and its multiple policies of extermination, have decided that the struggle for the liberation of indigenous peoples is an anticapitalist struggle and one of unity with the other sectors of society, just as the Mixe thinker Floriberto Díaz already saw so long ago.

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CNI/EZLN: The Time Has Come

This communique was originally published by [Enlace Zapatista](#).



To To the People of Mexico,
To the Peoples of the World,
To the Media,
To the National and International Sixth,

We send our urgent word to the world from the Constitutive Assembly for the Indigenous Governing Council, where we met as peoples, communities, nations, and tribes of the National Indigenous Congress: Apache, Amuzgo, Chatino, Chichimeca, Chinanteco, Chol, Chontal of Oaxaca, Chontal of Tabasco, Coca, Cuicateco, Mestizo, Hñähñü, Ñathö, Ñuhhü, Ikoots, Kumiai, Lakota, Mam, Matlazinca, Maya, Mayo, Mazahua, Mazateco, Me`phaa, Mixe, Mixe-Popoluca, Mixteco, Mochó, Nahuatl or Mexicano, Nayeri, Popoluca, Purépecha, Q´anjob´al, Rarámuri, Tének, Tepehua, Tlahuica, Tohono Odham, Tojolabal, Totonaco, Triqui, Tseltal, Tsotsil, Wixárika, Xi´iuy, Yaqui, Binniza, Zoque, Akimel O´otham, and

Comkaac.

THE WAR THAT WE LIVE AND CONFRONT

We find ourselves in a very serious moment of violence, fear, mourning, and rage due to the intensification of the capitalist war against everyone, everywhere throughout the national territory. We see the murder of women for being women, of children for being children, of whole peoples for being peoples.

The political class has dedicated itself to turning the State into a corporation that sells off the land of the originary peoples, campesinos, and city dwellers, that sells people as if they were just another commodity to kill and bury like raw material for the drug cartels, that sells people to capitalist businesses that exploit them until they are sick or dead, or that sells them off in parts to the illegal organ market.

Then there is the pain of the families of the disappeared and their decision to find their loved ones despite the fact that the government is determined for them not to, because there they will also find the rot that rules this country.

This is the destiny that those above have built for us, bent on the destruction of the social fabric—what allows us to recognize ourselves as peoples, nations, tribes, barrios, neighborhoods, and families—in order to keep us isolated and alone in our desolation as they consolidate the appropriation of entire territories in the mountains, valleys, coasts, and cities.

This is the destruction that we have not only denounced but confronted for the past 20 years and which in a large part of the country is evolving into open war carried out by criminal corporations which act in shameless complicity with all branches of the bad government and with all of the political parties and institutions. Together they constitute the power of above and provoke revulsion in millions of Mexicans in the countryside and the city.

In the midst of this revulsion they continue to tell us to vote for them, to believe in the power from above, to let them continue to design and impose our destiny.

On that path we see only an expanding war, a horizon of death and destruction for our lands, our families, and our lives, and the absolute certainty that this will only get worse—much worse—for everyone.

OUR WAGER

We reiterate that only through resistance and rebellion have we found possible paths by

which we can continue to live and through which we find not only a way to survive the war of money against humanity and against our Mother Earth, but also the path to our rebirth along with that of every seed we sow and every dream and every hope that now materializes across large regions in autonomous forms of security, communication, and self-government for the protection and defense of our territories. In this regard there is no other path than the one walked below. Above we have no path; that path is theirs and we are mere obstacles.

These sole alternative paths, born in the struggle of our peoples, are found in the indigenous geographies throughout all of our Mexico and which together make up the National Indigenous Congress. We have decided not to wait for the inevitable disaster brought by the capitalist hitmen that govern us, but to go on the offensive and convert our hope into an Indigenous Governing Council for Mexico which stakes its claim on life from below and to the anticapitalist left, which is secular, and which responds to the seven principles of Rule by Obeying as our moral pledge.

No demand of our peoples, no determination and exercise of autonomy, no hope made into reality has ever corresponded to the electoral ways and times that the powerful call "democracy". Given that, we intend not only to wrest back from them our destiny which they have stolen and spoiled, but also to dismantle the rotten power that is killing our peoples and our mother earth. For that task, the only cracks we have found that have liberated consciences and territories, giving comfort and hope, are resistance and rebellion.

By agreement of this constitutive assembly of the Indigenous Governing Council [CIG when abbreviated in Spanish], we have decided to name as spokesperson our compañera María de Jesús Patricio Martínez of the Nahuatl people, whose name we will seek to place on the electoral ballot for the Mexican presidency in 2018 and who will be the carrier of the word of the peoples who make up the CIG, which in turn is highly representative of the indigenous geography of our country.

So then, we do not seek to administer power; we want to dismantle it from within the cracks from which we know we are able.

OUR CALL

We trust in the dignity and honesty of those who struggle: teachers, students, campesinos, workers, and day laborers, and we want to deepen the cracks that each of them has forged, dismantling power from above from the smallest level to the largest. We want to make so many cracks that they become our honest and anticapitalist government.

We call on the thousands of Mexicans who have stopped counting their dead and

disappeared and who, with grief and suffering, have raised their fists and risked their own lives to charge forward without fear of the size of the enemy, and have seen that there are indeed paths but that they have been hidden by corruption, repression, disrespect, and exploitation.

We call on those who believe in themselves, who believe in the *compañero* at their side, who believe in their history and their future: we call on them to not be afraid to do something new, as this is the only path that gives us certainty in the steps we take.

Our call is to organize ourselves in every corner of the country, to gather the necessary elements for the Indigenous Governing Council and our spokeswoman to be registered as an independent candidate for the presidency of this country and, yes, to crash the party of those above which is based on our death and make it our own, based on dignity, organization, and the construction of a new country and a new world.

We convoke all sectors of society to be attentive to the steps decided and defined by the Indigenous Governing Council, through our spokeswoman, to not give in, to not sell out, and to neither stray nor tire from the task of carving the arrow that will carry the offensive of all of the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, organized or not, straight toward the true enemy.

From CIDECI-UNITIERRA, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas

May 28, 2017

For the Full Reconstitution of Our Peoples

Never Again a Mexico Without Us

National Indigenous Congress

Zapatista Army for National Liberation

Alvaro Reyes: Zapatismo: Other Geographies Circa the “End of the World”

Originally Published by [Society and Space](#).



Introduction: the walking dead

As daylight broke across the Southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas on 21 December 2012, news cameras fixated on the throngs of tourists that had overtaken the state to witness the ‘end of the world’ purportedly predicted by the ancient Maya. Yet in the cities of Altamirano, Palenque, Las Margaritas, Ocosingo, and San Cristóbal de las Casas reports began to emerge of unusual activity: groups of indigenous people constructing makeshift wood stages atop the back of pickup trucks. Hours later 45 000 masked members of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), all of them Chol, Tzeltal, Mam, Tojolobal, Zoque, and Tzotzil Mayan indigenous peoples, descended on these city centers in perfectly ordered columns. Bystanders stood incredulously in front of the improvised stages waiting for the masked Mayans to make a statement of some sort, but the Zapatistas marched by the thousands

across the stages in chilling silence with their left fists in the air. In a matter of hours, the Zapatista contingent had left the city centers in the same silence and with the same much-commented-upon discipline with which they had arrived, leaving many wondering what this—the largest march in the history of Chiapas and the largest mobilization of Zapatistas ever seen—was all about. Late that evening, an equally cryptic five-line message appeared on the EZLN’s website. Signed by *Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos* for the General Command of the EZLN, it read:

“ To Whom It May Concern: Did you hear that?

That is the sound of your world crumbling.

That is the sound of our world resurging.

The day that was day was night.

And night shall be the day that will be day” (EZLN, 2012a, my translation).

In a communiqué a few days later, the Zapatistas would further aid us in unraveling the mystery surrounding their actions of 21 December 2012, stating that what others had mistaken for prophecy (that is, ‘the end of the world’), they had set out to make promise (that is, ending *this* world) (EZLN, 2012b).

Amazingly, just months before their massive ‘End of the World’ march, the EZLN had been declared all but dead by a number of sectors of Mexican society. In this paper I will attempt to fill a lacuna in Anglophone academic discourse by offering a comprehensive analysis of the events surrounding both the ‘death’ and ‘resurgence’ of the EZLN. The paper is divided into two major sections. The first, titled “The death of the EZLN? Or the death of Mexico?” begins with an examination of the way in which, after an explicitly ‘anticapitalist’ reorientation of its political strategy in the early to mid-2000s, the EZLN became radically isolated from the ‘progressive’ and institutional left in Mexican society and was effectively declared dead by the Mexican government. In order to understand the epochal societal shifts that made the EZLN’s strategic reorientation necessary, I examine the contemporary decomposition of Mexico that began with the evisceration of communal land tenure and Article 27 of the Mexican constitution, opening it to the destructive dynamics of neoliberal reterritorialization. Having laid out the end of the social contract that had made ‘the people of Mexico’ a reality, I end this first section by outlining the contemporary growth of legal exceptionality in Mexico and of political rule through the terror that now engulfs the country with the full complicity of the entire Mexican political class. In the second major section of this paper, “Life after death: how the EZLN proposes to build postcapitalism”, I develop three major points through a close reading of Zapatista texts and a firsthand

account of contemporary Zapatista political institutions. First, I show that the EZLN, through a systematic analysis of the structural crisis of capitalism, both foresaw and explained the situation that now grips Mexico and increasingly, according to the Zapatistas, the rest of the world. Second, I analyze the way that the EZLN, by adding new dimensions to the 'geometry' of political struggle, is able to conceptualize a 'world' in the here and now beyond that of neoliberal capitalism, potentially freeing political thought and action far beyond Chiapas from the mutually reinforcing dead ends of either reviving neoliberal capitalism or falling into apocalyptic despair. Finally, through a brief personal narrative of my own experience in 2013 as a student of what the Zapatistas termed their 'Little School', I examine the ways in which the Zapatistas' political strategy, based on the construction of alternative institutionality, has been intimately tied to the practices of building what they call 'another geography'. This construction of new nonseparatist territorial practices has today been taken up by other organizations across Mexico and increasingly overlaps and contradicts the territories of neoliberal calculation and destruction. I argue that these Zapatista 'other geographies' might serve as concrete examples of a viable anticapitalist spatial strategy and therefore must be taken far more seriously than they have been by the left generally and critical geography more specifically.

Section I: the death of the EZLN? Or the death of Mexico?

A Chronicle of a death foretold

The EZLN is today still most widely known for its 1 January 1994 uprising against the Mexican government. Those twelve days of armed action turned out to be one of the first volleys in what would become a generalized region-wide wave of resistance against the ever-deepening consolidation of an incredibly unstable and brutal neoliberal project in Latin America (Reyes, 2012). The EZLN's uprising soon gave way to negotiations with the Mexican government and the then ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—negotiations that from the very beginning centered on the EZLN's demand for the reintroduction of the *de jure* protection of collective land tenure that had been eviscerated as a condition of Mexico's entry into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Through these negotiations the EZLN's struggle became a central rallying point for a wide panoply of opponents of neoliberal 'reform' in Mexico, from radical unions to debtors' organizations, from indigenous and peasant organizations to the progressive elements of Mexico's 'left of center' Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD).

In order to achieve this, the Zapatistas chose to develop (at least publicly) a discursive strategy centered on the voice and image of Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos. In

formulations that suggestively parallel Ernesto Laclau's (1996) analysis regarding the political centrality of the "empty signifier", the Zapatistas describe their discursive strategy as an attempt to construct the figure of 'Marcos' as a placeholder for the desires of the widest swath of Mexican society possible. As the EZLN notes, at that time there was a 'Marcos' for every occasion and every political persuasion (EZLN, 2014a). Mexican society took up this figure as their own, as could be evidenced by the highly popular refrain of "*Todos somos Marcos*". This was a phrase that had the virtue of illustrating precisely the political potential of the empty signifier, in that in Spanish it simultaneously denotes this figure's power to unite ("We are all Marcos") and premises that space of unity on radical social dispersal ("Marcos is all of us"). The Zapatistas hoped, then, that through this empty signifier an extremely fragmented Mexican 'civil society' might unite against the common neoliberal enemy embodied by the PRI. The figure of 'Marcos' was thus the placeholder for the 'counter-hegemony of the diverse' (page 402) that would seek not so much to impose 'a revolution' as to coordinate the forces inside and outside of the state in order to build a space of egalitarian articulation (Rabasa, 1997). This would be a 'radical democracy' (page 418) where the direction and purpose of that future revolution might be disputed by Mexican 'civil society' (Rabasa, 1997). Importantly, through this discursive strategy, the EZLN's influence at the time was such that, as the Mexican analyst Luis Hernández Navarro (2013) reminds us, its uprising and subsequent opposition was the single largest (but not the only) reason for the eventual fall of the PRI's seventy-year dictatorship.

Salinas de Gortari and his PRI successors, for their part, eschewed serious negotiation with the EZLN and sought instead to isolate the EZLN through a counterinsurgency plan detailed in the Mexican Secretary of Defense's *Plan de Campaña Chiapas 94* that included the formation of paramilitary organizations in Zapatista-influenced regions, as well as the targeted use of government subsidies to divide Zapatista communities.(1)

In 2001, with the PRI out of presidential office for the first time in seventy years, the Zapatistas took their initiative for Constitutional Reforms on Indigenous Rights and Culture across Mexico in what they termed 'The march of the color of the earth'. Millions of Mexicans, with representatives from fifty-six of Mexico's indigenous peoples and more than a few internationals, came out in an overwhelming show of support for this new initiative. The march culminated on 11 March 2001, with over a million Zapatista supporters filling Mexico City's enormous *Zócalo*. The magnitude of support for the event generated widespread expectation that at least some versions of the Zapatistas' proposed reforms would be approved by the Mexican legislature and signed by then President Vicente Fox. Despite widespread support for their initiative, the Zapatistas' efforts at constitutional reform met with utter failure as all three major political parties in the Mexican senate—the right-wing National Action Party (PAN), the center-right PRI, and, most surprisingly, the institutional 'left' represented by the PRD—joined together to oppose the EZLN's constitutional reforms. Thus, after years of (at least outwardly) crafting a national

counterhegemonic project, what had been the Zapatistas' discursive strategy up until that point reached an obvious dead end. Many analysts believed at the time that the EZLN would simply return to Chiapas and limit its activities to its communities of influence while leaving questions of national political power to others. More specifically, much of the 'progressive' left in Mexico imagined that the EZLN would support the growing strength of the electoral left embodied in the PRD—a party that many in Mexico imagined would come to power in direct parallel to the rise of counterhegemonic 'progressive governments' throughout the rest of Latin America. Much to their dismay, the EZLN instead released the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle on 25 June 2005, explicitly severing all ties to the entire Mexican political class. Most surprisingly, it definitively and harshly distanced itself from the presidential campaign of the PRD's Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), noting that it could not and would not partake in the 'change' that the electoral left imagined he embodied. The EZLN reasoned that the PRD had explicitly worked to defeat the Zapatistas' initiative on constitutional reforms, that PRD officials (the great majority of them ex-PRI operatives) had partaken in counterinsurgent actions against the Zapatistas, and most importantly, that the PRD and AMLO had explicitly made their peace with the international neoliberal order (EZLN, 2005a). AMLO had praised the PAN's Vicente Fox for having achieved what he termed 'macroeconomic equilibrium' (specifically referring to the neoliberal axioms of reduced deficit spending and low inflation) for Mexico. AMLO vowed to maintain that 'equilibrium' and asserted that "State action does not suffocate the [private] initiative of civil society" (Petrich, 2011). Thanks to documents obtained by Wikileaks, we know such statements had their desired effect, if only with the US embassy in Mexico. In an aptly titled cable, "AMLO: Apocalypse Not", US ambassador Tony Garza concluded that AMLO was "putting the correct pieces into place" and that among its proposed cabinet members, "none of them are radicals." In fact, subsequent US embassy cables go on to speculate that much of AMLO's 'populism' was simply 'campaign rhetoric', and that when faced with proposals emanating from within left sectors of Mexico's political class, the embassy reassured Washington, "We don't think AMLO will support these more radical ideas" (Petrich, 2011, page 2).

Yet the Zapatistas did not read the PRD's political betrayal as an attack solely on them, nor as the result of the personal failings of AMLO. As would later become evident, they saw their predicament as a clear sign of the arrival of a new objective political situation in Mexico as a whole. On the basis of what they had learned over previous years, they stated, "we rose up against a national power only to realize that that power no longer exists ... what exists is a global power that produces uneven dominations in different locations, what we are up against is finance capital and speculation" (*Zapatista* 1999). This realization, then, required a new strategic outlook for Zapatismo, one whose tone was captured by Subcomandante Marcos when he stated, "we no longer make the distinctions we once made [among the Mexican political class], between those who are bad and those who are better. No, they are all the same" (Castellanos, 2008, page 54).

As a direct contestation to the political class, the Zapatistas set out in 2006 on what they called 'the other campaign'. This was neither an initiative for any of the existing presidential candidates nor a call for abstention. Rather, it was a campaign to highlight the need to build an explicitly anticapitalist organization across Mexico that would in effect create what they called 'another politics' and thus act as a counterforce to the alliance of the political class and capitalism. The Zapatistas predicted that many of their former supporters would quickly turn on them and staunchly defend the presidential candidacy of AMLO and electoralism more generally. In fact, they were so certain of this outcome that they wrote a preemptive '(non)farewell' letter addressed to 'civil society' attempting to explain their position and, in a sense, publicly foretelling their impending death (EZLN, 2005b). Their intuition proved correct: Mexico's institutional left was flabbergasted, and reactions to the EZLN's new initiatives were swift and often vicious. The isolation of the EZLN from the institutional left would only become more severe when, after what was almost certainly electoral fraud during the 2006 presidential election (Díaz-Polanco, 2012)—the mechanics of which were detailed and roundly denounced by Subcomandante Marcos live on radio the day after the election(2)—some on the electoral left went so far as to tie the EZLN's critique to AMLO defeat (Rodríguez Araujo, 2006). Subsequently, coverage of the EZLN and EZLN communiqués all but disappeared from Mexico's 'progressive' press. From that point on, it was not uncommon to encounter among the institutional left and its progressive allies (especially in Mexico City), the idea that "the EZLN no longer exist[ed]."(3)

Upon assuming the presidency in December of 2006, Felipe Calderón of the right-wing PAN quickly seized upon the EZLN's political isolation. Calderón designated a long-time PAN operative, the nonindigenous Luis H Álvarez, as Director of the Office of Indigenous Development. Álvarez by his own account spent much of his initial years in this post trying to mount what he termed a 'peaceful' counterinsurgency strategy in Chiapas. Álvarez's strategy in effect served as an intensification of the counterinsurgency strategy Plan Chiapas 94. By directing federal subsidies toward Zapatista communities that would agree to leave the organization (and thereby abandon its policy of not accepting government money), Álvarez hoped to pull the EZLN base away from its leadership, a strategy that by 2012 Álvarez claimed had been a resounding success.

With the release of Álvarez's book *Indigenous Heart: Struggle and Hope of the Original Peoples of Mexico* in June 2012, the narrative of the supposed demise of the EZLN that circulated within the political class reached its peak (only a few months before the Zapatistas' thunderous reappearance on 21 December 2012). The book release became a celebration and a funeral of sorts, organized in order to show the Mexican nation the body of the defunct EZLN via live stream. Both Calderón and an ecstatic Álvarez openly reveled in the disappearance of the EZLN and personally took credit for resolving what they called the 'indigenous problem' in Chiapas. If the EZLN had, as Álvarez and Calderón claimed, in effect been killed off, the body of EZLN spokesperson and military strategist

Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos stood in for the EZLN as a whole. According to Álvarez, reading aloud from his book, as Marcos languished in the throes of terminal lung cancer, he had, unbeknownst to the rest of the EZLN, approached the Mexican government for medical help that would save him. According to another story, circulated by the Al Jazeera News Network, Subcomandante Marcos was about to suffer what must certainly be the only fate worse than death for a Latin American guerrilla leader: he had accepted an offer to leave the EZLN and live out his life as a professor in a small town in upstate New York (Arsenault, 2011).(4)

In sum, for Mexico's traditional political class, its 'progressive' left, and many of their would-be international supporters, as of mid-2012 the Zapatistas and their spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos were as good as dead.

B. Neoliberal reterritorialization: the death of Mexico?

From the late 1980s to 2000 the PRI, still operating as a de facto state party, attempted to implement a series of structural reforms to privatize electricity, education, collectively held lands, and the national oil industry and thus erode the mechanisms of redistribution that had been established by the postrevolutionary constitution of 1917. This initial set of reforms was touted by the PRI, and more specifically by Carlos Salinas de Gortari, as the dawn of a bright new neoliberal era for Mexico.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, under the advisement of the World Bank and in preparation for the upcoming NAFTA, the burgeoning neoliberal establishment in Mexico viewed the collective forms of land tenure as *the* key impediment to foreign direct investment and 'economic growth'.(5) These forms of inalienable, imprescriptible, and nontransferrable land tenure—*ejidos* and *bienes comunales*—had been protected by Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution. Article 27 had also granted agrarian communities rights over common-use lands and their resources, making all natural resources found in the subsoil property of the nation. Through changes to Article 27 that opened communal land to rent, sale, and use as collateral to obtain commercial credit, and through state programs such as PROCEDE(6) providing economic subsidies in exchange for the individual 'certification' of collective lands (the first step in a process that it was hoped would end in private titles), the PRI took direct aim at what they viewed as the least 'income-yielding' sector of the Mexican economy.

If we take up the legal theorist Carl Schmitt's (2003) lesson that all political ideas imply a particular spatial order and vice versa, there is no single piece of legislation in postrevolutionary Mexico that embodies this precept as obviously as Article 27 of the Mexican constitution. The territorial reordering implied in attacks on *ejidal* and communal land that were frequently discussed in terms of simple 'economic' expediency were in fact

nothing short of a direct attack on the postrevolutionary political status quo that had tenuously reigned in Mexico since 1917.

Postrevolutionary Mexico's capitalist fractions had hoped to contain the threat of radical forces such as those of Emiliano Zapata's *Ejército Libertador del Sur* by creating a territorial order that would provide the material and symbolic suture between capitalist economic growth, the institutions of state mediation, and the majority of the Mexican people understood as peasant laborers. They did this by placing the *ejido* (and the productive labor therein) at the very center of the postrevolutionary juridical order. In effect, I think we must understand Article 27 as the space and juridical ground upon which the constitutional entity of 'the Mexican people' found its material existence beyond that of an abstract existential entity, beyond that of an 'identity'. Article 27 contained the specific spatial ordering in which 'the people' (be they capitalists or Zapatistas) could (co)exist in a clearly hierarchical but (potentially) redistributionist truce.

In this way, Mexico prefigured in an agricultural context what Antonio Negri calls the 'constitutions of labor' formed in the factory-centered societies of Europe and the United States after the Second World War. In these societies, labor (in the case of Mexico, agrarian labor) is recognized as both the basis of social valorization and "the source of institutional and constitutional structures" (Negri, 1994).(7) Importantly, then, when all three major political parties struck down the EZLN's initiative to revive Article 27 through the Constitutional Reforms on Indigenous Rights and Culture, this was not due solely to the fact that the Mexican political class desired to exclude the indigenous peoples of Mexico from 'the Mexican people'. It was also due to the far more novel situation in which the Mexican political class, through its complete abandonment of the territorial ordering implied in Article 27, was now willing to openly acknowledge that the breakdown of the postrevolutionary mediational state was in fact irreversible. The actions of the political class were alerting all of Mexico (although few outside of the EZLN seemed to notice) to the fact that the death of 'the Mexican people' had already taken place, and that no one can be included or excluded from something that no longer exists.

C. Terror as strategy

By the mid-2000s, and despite enormous efforts such as PROCEDE and cuts to agricultural subsidies, it became clear that the great majority of collective landholders in Mexico refused to give up their collective titles, preferring even to rent out their land in order to generate income rather than modify its collective character (de Ita, 2006). This led actors within the World Bank, the ever-interventionist community of US military analysts, and the Mexican political class to assert that before further neoliberal reforms could succeed, the longstanding efforts to dismantle collective land tenure would have to be redoubled (Bessi and Navarro, 2014; World Bank, 2001).

At the very moment when the Mexican state was reinforcing its efforts to cut back social programs for, and mediational presence in, agricultural communities, an increasingly unprotected workforce was coming into contact with the transnational drug economy. That burgeoning economy not only sought to use Mexico as a transportation corridor for South American cocaine headed for the US, but also looked to amass the land, workforce, and transportation infrastructure necessary to make Mexico the fastest growing producer and supplier of heroin and methamphetamines for US consumption (Watt and Zepeda, 2012, pages 76-83). Thus, the reterritorialization implicit in the changes to Article 27 abutted and abetted the territorial reorganization required by the increasing competition for land, transportation routes, and profits within the illicit drug trade.

Although competition for the high-yielding speculative profits of this illicit trade are bound to involve heightened levels of violence, many today believe that Calderón's policy response to the growth of the drug trade—the rollout of a full-blown 'war on drugs'—did not arise from the existence or nature of the drug trade itself. As the academic and military affairs analyst Carlos Fazio hypothesizes, Calderón, in conjunction with the US State Department, circulated the notion that the illicit drug trade amounted to a 'narco-insurgency', a rogue 'parallel state' in the making. This narrative, Fazio believes, served to propagate the idea that the widespread militarization of Mexican society was absolutely necessary in order to neutralize the threat from what Calderón called a burgeoning 'internal enemy' (Fazio, 2013). The danger posed by this 'internal enemy' in turn justified the nullification of constitutional measures that prohibited the Mexican military from fulfilling domestic police functions, as well as the implicit cancellation of civil liberties and due process this would imply on a daily basis in the country's streets. For Fazio (2013, pages 371-406) then, this 'war' would necessarily amount to nothing less than the de facto imposition of a 'state of exception' in in which as Giorgio Agamben (2005) explains, the application of the norm is suspended, "while the law remains in force" (page 31).

Notably, after Calderón's declaration of a war on drugs and the consolidation of a state of exception, the drug trade in Mexico actually flourished. Consider, for example, the fact that between 2006 and 2012 the production of heroin and marijuana grew and the production of methamphetamines absolutely exploded, while at the same time fewer poppy fields and marijuana plants were destroyed and seizures of cocaine went down. Consequently, six years after Calderón's war on drugs began, Mexico had become the single largest point of production and transportation for the illicit drug trade in the Americas (Hernández, 2013a).

If the growing state of exception seemed to leave the drug trade untouched, it did result in what *Le Monde* called "the most deadly conflict on the planet in the last few years": between 80 000 and 150 000 dead, approximately 30 000 more disappeared, and some 1.5 million people forcibly displaced (Hernández, 2013a, pages 9-13). As Melissa Wright has pointed out, rather than provoking outrage, these grim statistics seemed to have become

the very foundation of the Mexican state's new efforts at legitimation. That is, given its inability to provide the redistributive benefits of past decades, the new Mexican state began to redefine social progress by shifting from a discourse of national development to that of national 'security'. Within this new discourse of security, the Mexican state now functions under the assumption that all those killed in drug-related violence should be presumed elements of the 'narco-insurgency'. Therefore, the worse these drug-related statistics become, the greater the proof that the Mexican state has fulfilled its duty to protect the population from this growing internal threat (Wright, 2011, pages 285-298).

Given this apparent shift from the discourse of development to that of security, Fazio and the Mexican sociologist Raquel Gutierrez (among others) believe it is a mistake to simply discount the Mexican state's war on drugs as a failure. These analysts believe that in addition to providing the basis for a new form of state legitimation, this 'war' is best understood as a direct response to the antineoliberal resistance that immediately preceded the war on drugs. It is important to remember that the package of neoliberal reforms from the late 1980s onwards was met with an uncoordinated yet unprecedented wave of resistance across Mexico (Gilly et al, 2006). Although this is rarely acknowledged, this wave of antineoliberal resistance or 'generalized social insubordination' to neoliberalism proved to be the determining political factor in Mexico for years to come, just as in the rest of Latin America (Gutierrez Aguilar, 2005; Reyes, 2012). In fact, these scholars argue that the actions of the Mexican political class in the last two decades can be understood only when viewed as a counteroffensive to this resistance. More specifically, these analysts claim that the purpose of this war on drugs was to neutralize these struggles in three very specific ways. First, the inordinate amount of violence this 'war' unleashed allowed the Mexican political class to conjoin politics and terror—to practice politics *as* terror—which in turn created a sense of fear and social isolation among Mexico's residents and undermined the web of alternative socialities that had subtended antineoliberal resistance (Fazio, 2013, pages 377-380). Second, the social fragmentation produced by the generalization of fear in the war on drugs had the 'benefit' of breaking down Mexican society's capacity to come to a general understanding of what was actually taking place (of what was what, and who was who). As Gutierrez explains, this in turn opened the possibility that instead of the political 'cooptation' that had characterized the counterinsurgency practices of the PRI dictatorship, today's counterinsurgency (sans redistributionary mechanisms) might instead consist of sowing 'confusion' so that the very reasons for struggle are irretrievably lost, even to social movements themselves (Brighenti, 2013). Finally, on the ground across Mexico, the war on drugs allowed for coordinated action of state and paramilitary forces—under the orders of the political class, drug cartels, and transnational corporations—against community-level resistance (Lopez y Rivas, 2014). As a perfect illustration of Gutierrez's point regarding the political deployment of confusion, these forces are often presented to the public by state officials and the media as grassroots community movements that have arisen against the power of drug cartels.

Given the effects of these strategies, the political class now felt prepared to square the macabre circle of neoliberal policy in Mexico. In December 2012, after twelve years of absence, the PRI, through Enrique Peña Nieto, returned to the presidency. In what has been referred to as a 'lightning' strategy, and counting on the weakening of antineoliberal resistance, Peña Nieto once again presented the longstanding proposals for the privatization of oil, education, and health care, the further evisceration of protection of collective land tenure, the elimination of the progressive elements of the federal tax code, and the deregulation of labor law. Amidst the giddiness of a reactivated neoliberal offensive (as well as an unmentioned 25 000 drug- war-related deaths during his first year in office), *TIME* magazine concluded Peña Nieto and this package of reforms were poised to 'save Mexico' (Crowley and Mascareñas, 2014). This time around, and unlike in the mid-1990s, the Mexican political class as a whole stood shoulder to shoulder with the core of PRI policy. In fact, within weeks of the PRI's return to the presidency, all three major political parties (PAN, PRI, and PRD) signed the 'national pact for Mexico'. The 'national pact' was an outline agreement of how these parties would cooperate in the Mexican legislature and senate to finally achieve the neoliberal reforms that had been slowed by the resistance of the past decades. For many, the PRD's participation in Peña Nieto's neoliberal 'pact' made it painfully clear where the left's electoralist strategy in Mexico had led: in the words of PRD founder Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, the PRD and the electoral left in Mexico as a whole had over the last two decades "accomplished everything [they had] set out to oppose" (Villamil, 2013, page 32).

Importantly then, the Mexico that the EZLN marched 'back' into on 21 December 2012 was not the same country. Rather, the tendencies toward national decomposition pointed out long ago by the EZLN had clearly taken a devastating toll on Mexican society. As became clear to the rest of the world through the much-publicized case of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero (Gibler, 2015), the consequences of this social disintegration have been grave: the death of 'the Mexican people', the generalization of terror, the weakening of antineoliberal resistance, a fully complicit institutional left, and tens of thousands of dead and disappeared. Given this context, it is no exaggeration to suggest that, in its rush to bury the Zapatistas, the 'progressive' left neglected to ask itself if throughout those same years it was not Mexico itself that was slowly dying.

Section II: life after death: how the EZLN proposes to build

postcapitalism

A. The world that is crumbling

Despite the disastrous role of the electoral left in both legislating and legitimating neoliberalism in Mexico, as biting summarized by Muñoz Ledo above, there exist few systemic accounts (that is, accounts that move beyond personalist narratives of ‘greed’ and ‘betrayal’) that offer us a comprehensive explanatory framework for the contemporary decomposition of Mexico and the changing structural role of the state and political class within that decomposition. Lacking this systemic account, a number of theorists have turned their attention to the Zapatistas’ break with the Mexican political class and their attempts at building ‘another politics’, and concluded that these amount to nothing more than a sectarian ‘antipolitical’ drift that has led to the ‘failure’ of Zapatista initiatives and to their increasing political irrelevance (Almeyra, 2014; Mondonesi, 2014; Wilson, 2014). It should be noted here that these supposed EZLN shortcomings are often explained in terms of the personal failings (that is, the intransigence, sectarianism, and envy) of its (former) spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos (Almeyra, 2014; Rodriguez Araujo, 2008).

Yet, in sharp contrast to these analyses, after the failure of their initiative on constitutional reforms, the Zapatistas set out on an extensive evaluation of contemporary capitalism that in many ways foresaw the destructive dynamics that today grip Mexico and, increasingly, the rest of the world. In order to examine the Zapatistas’ account of these dynamics, we might first ask what it is that they meant in their 21 December 2012 message that ‘your world’ is ‘crumbling’. Examination of the Zapatistas’ extensive literature on this topic makes evident that for them, the world that is crumbling is that of capitalism. In their description of the crumbling of this world, the Zapatistas ask us to imagine capitalism as a building of sorts. In the past, those on top of this world would add floors to the building—what Marx would have referred to as the expanding ‘self-valorization of value’ (Marx, 1976), or what is often erroneously referred to as ‘growth’. This is a process made possible through the exploitation, dispossession, repression, and disvalorization of those below—what the EZLN refers to as ‘the four wheels of capitalism’ (EZLN, 2013). This allowed those on top to further distinguish themselves, while creating the possibility (however remote) that those below (at least those willing to give in to the social relations of the value form) might move up a floor (most often through redistributive state action).

Today, as the Zapatistas explain, within neoliberal globalization the four wheels of capitalism continue on with a vengeance, but have come unhinged from the capitalist motor that previously drove the construction of new floors (EZLN, 2013). Absent the capacity to build new floors (to rise on the back of the expansion of the self-valorization of value), those on the top of the capitalist world building have little choice but to systematically turn to

'speculation' (that is, the attempt to stay on top through profitability minus value expansion) (EZLN, 2014a). According to the Zapatistas, these 'speculative' attempts of those at the top to maintain their elevated positions can only come at the cost of the short-sighted and disastrous demolition of the floors and building foundations below them (EZLN, 2013). Consequently, the social relations, territories, and institutions dependent on the expansive dynamic of the self-valorization of value—perhaps most importantly, the state—are completely refunctionalized. From this perspective, political spaces (that is, those spaces between state and civil society), which previously served as sites for mediation, deliberation, and representation, today are reduced to guaranteeing immediate corporate profitability. Lacking the material with which to mediate social conflict (that is, growing self-valorizing value) that in previous eras might have allowed for redistribution and some dialectic of demand and reform, the state now becomes the central machine for demolition, for unilateral dispossession and repression (the cause of the dynamics of 'exceptionality' highlighted by Fazio above). Thus, the Zapatistas claim that the era in which capital and the state could uphold even a semblance of peace and stability is over (EZLN, 2014a).

Given this refunctionalization of the state, the problem for Mexico under the "reign of speculation" (that is, neoliberal globalization), according to the Zapatistas, is not "that the political system has links to organized crime, to narco trafficking, to attacks, aggressions, rapes, beatings, imprisonments, disappearances, and murders", but rather "that all of this today constitutes its essence" (EZLN, 2014b, no page number). The Italian journalist Roberto Saviano offers a strikingly parallel insight in his 2013 foreword to Anabel Hernández's *Narcoland*. Saviano notes that too often the cataclysmic violence that Mexico faces has been minimized and misunderstood by attributing it to a "mafia that has transformed itself into a [transnational] capitalist enterprise", effectively coopting the Mexican state. For Saviano, however (as well as for the Zapatistas), this perspective entirely misses the point that in the era of speculation "[transnational] capitalism has transformed itself into a mafia", effectively creating a world in which political economy and criminal economy are but one and the same (Hernández, 2013b, pages viii-x). According to the Zapatistas, then, the problem is not that states have disappeared but rather that they have been entirely remade as nodes of a single global network of contemporary 'mafia capitalism' [what the EZLN calls 'the empire of money'].

I think we must understand three important points that follow from this Zapatista analysis. First, in sharp contrast to the analysis suggested in 2009 by the (now defunct) US Joint Forces Command (Debusmann, 2009), the Zapatistas in no way believe that Mexico is—or is on the verge of becoming—a 'failed state'. For them Mexico is, rather, a paradigmatic example of a 'successful' contemporary capitalist '(non)national state', with all the death, fragmentation, and destruction this entails (EZLN, 2005a). Second, the political class and the institutional left cannot simply stand above the refunctionalization of the state. Rather, if we assume that the left has historically had some relation to the egalitarian but that even

the minimally redistributive mechanisms of the state have disappeared, there can by definition be no state-based left today. These positions, which the Zapatistas refer to as “above and to the left”, are simply attempts to enact what for them in today’s world is an “impossible geometry” (EZLN, 2005a, no page number). It would be far more accurate, they claim, to speak of the existence within state politics of a far-right, a right, and a moderate-right, all of which during the electoral cycle fight to appear under the banner of the ‘center’ (EZLN, 2005a). This helps us to understand why it is that (far beyond personal failings) those within the institutional left are constantly reduced to offering themselves as better managers of the very same demolition of the institutions and social relations required by contemporary capital [thus AMLO’s insistence on the need to maintain “macroeconomic equilibrium”] (EZLN, 2005a, no page number). Beyond Mexico, this analysis might also help us to understand how it is that counterhegemonic projects in the rest of Latin America—so admired by the progressive left in Mexico—shifted from the construction of ‘socialism for the 21st century’ only a decade ago to propounding ‘Andean-Amazonian capitalism’ today, or from the idea of building ‘oil sovereignty’ via the ‘Bolivarian Revolution’ to pleading for the securitization of oil debts in the offices of Goldman Sachs (Rathbone and Schipani, 2014; Svampa and Stefanoni, 2007). Third, given the crumbling of the world above, there arises the necessity of rebuilding politics from outside of the state apparatus (what the Zapatistas call ‘another politics’). This necessity rises to the level of an unprecedented urgency given that the destructive and runaway character of contemporary capitalism, as described by the Zapatistas, presents the very real possibility that, as Mexican society can intuit from the experience of the last two decades, the entire building of capitalism itself may collapse, taking the conditions for social and biological life on Planet Earth along with it (EZLN, 2013).

B. The politics of changing worlds

As should be clear by now, the Zapatistas’ post-2001 conjunctural analysis of contemporary capitalism led them to conclude that the world up above was in fact crumbling and that, as they stated, “there is nothing that can be done up there” (EZLN, 2005a). They carefully avoided, however, promoting either some form of paralysis (that is, nothing can be done) or some form of automatism (that is, capitalism will disappear of its own accord). Rather, they insisted that even as the expansion of capitalist valorization was no longer a possibility, without concerted collective action the processes of exploitation, dispossession, repression, and disvalorization could continue indefinitely. Yet, if the Zapatistas believe that a politics ‘above and to the left’ is today an ‘impossible geometry’, the question still remains as to where in the social diagram they think their idea of ‘another politics’ might arise.

In order to understand the Zapatistas’ answer to this question, we must begin by highlighting their insistence, much like that of Karl Marx in his (1976) ‘idyllic proceedings’, that capitalism was not born of commodity production. Rather, as they state, “capitalism

was born of the blood of our [indigenous] peoples and the millions of our brothers and sisters who died during the European invasion" (EZLN, 2014c). From its beginning, then, capitalism was made possible by that 'dispossession', 'plunder', and 'invasion' called 'the conquest of the Americas'. This attempted conquest, the Zapatistas claim, initiated a 'war of extermination' against indigenous peoples that has lasted for more than 520 years, and has been characterized by "massacres, jail, death and more death" (National Indigenous Congress and EZLN, 2014, no page number). Thus, for the Zapatistas, capitalism has always been a two-sided affair: on one side the processes, institutions, and subjects associated with the expansion of the self-valorization of value (that is, the 'world up above'); and on the other, a foundational and ever-present exceptionality, a permanent state of war, directed at the non-European 'originary peoples' of the world. By identifying this 'global apartheid' (EZLN, 2013) as the ever-present condition for the production of capitalist value, the Zapatistas are able to see that although firmly *within* the world of capitalism, not all social subjects are *of* that world. By recovering this unique structural position (and note that this is not an identity or culture) of the 'damned of the earth' (Rodriguez Lascano, 2013) within capitalist modernity, the EZLN is able to further identify that below the network of transnational corporations, armies, and states that comprise the world of capitalist valorization, there exists a web of distinct social relations and structures of value that have been created by the always already walking dead subjects of capitalist modernity. Here, then, the Zapatistas are able to add coordinates to our contemporary 'political geometry': there is the dominant world of capitalist valorization 'up above', but there are simultaneously many worlds, immanent to the first, down below.

Having identified these new coordinates of above and below, the Zapatistas do not simply throw away the distinction between left and right. According to them, today these dualistic evaluations must be further complexified: everything must be examined within a quadrangular grid consisting simultaneously of left and right as well as above and below. On a conceptual level, this grid allows the Zapatistas to avoid falling into a series of traps latent within these more dualistic frameworks. First, by identifying both sides of the moving contradiction that is capitalism—that of capitalist valorization and that of a genocidal disvalorization—they avoid the trap of furthering the life of the former at the expense of those subject to the latter (that is, they avoid falling into the complicity of those above and to the left with racialized colonial and imperial projects). Second, as the world above crumbles and consequently expels large masses of people from its realm, this perspective opens the horizon of a politics beyond that of the attempted stabilization of that world (that is, the 'impossible geometry' of today's institutional left). Third, the Zapatistas are able to recognize that there are many projects that would simply like to harness these other worlds below in order to gain entrance into the world above (that is, projects that might attempt to draw a bridge between the world below and the one above and to the right). Finally, from this perspective the Zapatistas can resist the temptation of believing that one can simply hide in the worlds below, as if it was possible to forget that the existence of the world above

necessitates the destruction of these other worlds. This allows them to recognize as a mere chimera any strategy from below that presents itself as 'beyond left and right', thus seeking to jump over the necessity of ending capitalism (strategies that the Zapatistas might very well categorize as 'below and to the right').

Given this analysis, the Zapatistas conclude that only a politics 'below and to the left' might open the way beyond either apocalyptic despair or social democratic illusion. If for the Zapatistas the counterhegemonic strategy 'above and to the left' of 'changing governments' has been nullified by the neoliberal onslaught, their new political geometry helps clarify that politics today must be one of 'changing worlds' (EZLN, 2013). Concretely, instead of simply presuming the exteriority of the worlds below [as has been the depoliticizing tendency of the US-based academic discourse that goes by the name of 'the decolonial', see Rivera Cusicanqui (2012)], the Zapatistas propose that the politics of changing worlds requires the harnessing of the structures of value and social relations that are present below for the construction of organizational forces that would make possible the definitive exteriorization of those worlds from the world of capitalism.

C. Other geographies: the Zapatista construction of new territorialities

On 5 August 2013, a matter of months after the EZLN's 'End of the World' march, I boarded an open-back three-ton truck headed toward Zapatista territory as one of some 7000 students who would attend the Zapatistas' 'Little School' over the next six months. Each student of the Little School was sent to one of the five zones of Zapatista territory and assigned a family and a 'guardian' responsible for our care and education. We were then further distributed among the forty autonomous municipalities and finally into the hundreds of Zapatista communities that constitute each of these municipalities. The Little School itself deserves far more analysis and attention than I can provide here; I will limit myself to a very preliminary description of what the Zapatistas shared through this event, with the specific goal of providing elements to better grasp the strategy the EZLN has followed given its analysis of contemporary capitalism as laid out above.

As we arrived at the Little School, each student was handed a packet of four Zapatista textbooks titled *Autonomous Government I and II*, *Women's Participation*, and *Autonomous Resistance*. These were not a series of directives from organizational leadership, but rather accounts from hundreds of community members from each Zapatista zone explaining their daily experiences of building another politics. These textbooks served not just as primers for students to learn the history of building self-government in each zone, but as an introduction to Zapatista areas of work that we would witness in person: education, healthcare, traditional medicine, and collective productive projects, the latter serving as the primary source of income at a local level. Each day we were methodically introduced to the schools, clinics, women's collectives, and fields where each of these work areas were

carried out, and many students were able to sit in on local assemblies convoked in each community to plan our lessons. We then continued our education with zone-level courses where our Zapatista teachers detailed how each area of work we had witnessed was coordinated between the local communities (commissions), the municipal level (autonomous councils), and the zone (Good Government Councils). Here we also learned about municipal-level communal radio and video projects and, at the most expansive scale, zone-wide agroecological projects and commercial trade. All of this took place, at least in part, on the hundreds of thousands of acres of land recuperated by the EZLN in the 1994 uprising.

Through the Little School, what became apparent even in this brief glimpse into the intricacies of Zapatista autonomous institutional life was that the EZLN had for a long time followed what in the language of traditional Maoism we might call 'a two-legged strategy'. If the Zapatistas had publicly attempted to help weld together a national counterhegemonic project through the empty signifier of 'Marcos' they had also, since the founding of their autonomous municipalities in late 1994, expended enormous energy on the parallel strategy of building 'dual power'—the creation of a set of institutions that stand as a direct alternative to the existing institutions of the state (Lenin, 1964).(8) It seems that once the EZLN had concluded that the crumbling of the world above had obliterated the already tenuous tie between the counterhegemonic and the antisystemic—thus making the building of a project below and to the left an immediate necessity—its public discursive strategy became superfluous (something that might help explain why, on 25 May 2014, the figure of 'Marcos' was officially declared 'dead' by the very man behind that figure, now appearing in perfect health under the name of *Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano*). Hence its previously internal work, now solidified by two decades of experience, was brought to the fore as a concrete existing example of a strategic anticapitalist alternative for the left as whole.

Yet, even the Leninist concept of 'dual power' or the parallel Maoist strategy of 'building red bases' ultimately proves inadequate to describe the Zapatista strategy. Both these ideas leave open the possibility that, even as their alternative institutions build mechanisms for the contestation of power, they depend on (and ultimately seek) the same single social substance of power as that of the state. In other words, from the ambivalence inherent in these concepts it might appear that the Zapatistas have attempted to construct a demarcated subterritory "within the territorial logic of power commanded by the Mexican state" (Harvey, 2010, page 252). However, from the Zapatista's perspective, 'the territorial logic' of the Mexican state (the territory of the Mexican nation-state) no longer exists as such. The EZLN is acutely aware that in the latest wave of reterritorialization, Mexico's formerly 'national' territory (like its spaces of institutional mediation) has been fragmented into hundreds of pieces, each subordinated to the needs of multinational corporations, drug cartels, and local political mafias (that is, the needs of contemporary capitalism). This is the territorial consequence of the formation of what the Zapatistas refer to as a capitalist "non-nation state" (EZLN, 2005a), reflecting a process of fragmentation that is in their eyes

irreversible.

Furthermore, for the Zapatistas, the entire purpose of the respatialization of struggle that we witnessed as students of the Little School—what they refer to as the construction of ‘another geography’—is to break (with) the logic of power of the state. As they say, “we think if we conceptualize a change in the premise of power, the problem of power, starting from the fact that we don’t want to take it, that could produce another kind of politics and another kind of political actor, other human beings that do politics differently than the politicians we have today across the political spectrum” (EZLN, 1997, page 69).

In the Zapatista project, then, ‘territory’ does not refer to the relations of a preexisting given subject to a given demarcated spatial extension as is imagined in the dominant conceptions of state territory (Brighenti, 2010). Rather, the Zapatistas take on the construction of new communities, municipalities, and zones—and the nonstate forms of government associated with each—as mechanisms for the production of this new subject of politics. In this practice, territory is not some “neutral carrier” of a single substance of power, but rather “the material inscription of social relations” that can be radically transformed in order to create another power (Brighenti, 2010, page 57). We might best characterize the Zapatista strategy, then, as the construction of another structure of relation between a newly produced collective subject and space—a new ‘territoriality’ (Raffestin and Butler, 2012). This allows the Zapatistas to grow their idea and practice of territory quite literally side-by-side (in the same communities) with the overlapping and contradictory territories of neoliberal calculation and destruction. From this perspective we can understand why it is that the Zapatistas see their territory not as a lever with which to enter this world, but rather as a strategy in the here and now to exit it.

Finally, as Alain Badiou (2008) has noted, the affirmative project of Zapatismo (theorized here as the building ‘other geographies’ that will sustain the new political subject) has allowed the Zapatistas to avoid imagining the process of exiting this world as a civil war—a violent and cataclysmic clash between worlds. Given their affirmative project, the military elements of Zapatismo have been steadily subordinated to the role of defending their political innovations. The importance of this shift should not be underestimated when, given the disappearance of its mediational capacity, the state seems to want nothing more than the militarization of political conflict, a medium it understands and easily dominates.

Conclusion: create two, three,

many other geographies

As the decomposition of the world above reaches new heights, and far from the cameras that previously fixated on 'Marcos', the Zapatistas' strategy of building 'other geographies' has grown in influence—from the construction of the autonomous municipalities of Cherán and Santa María de Ostula (Michoacan) to the reconsolidation of Mexico's National Indigenous Congress; from the recent declaration of twenty-two autonomous municipalities in the state of Guerrero to the explicitly Zapatista-inspired 'democratic confederalism' of today's Kurdish movement.

It is important to note that, despite the inspirational perseverance of the EZLN, the long-term temporal framework implicit in the Zapatistas' current political strategy renders unwarranted any conclusions about its ultimate success or failure. Yet the EZLN has undeniably added strategic coordinates to our contemporary 'political geometry', offering a distinct path to a global left that has tended to oscillate wildly and with little success between counterhegemony (verticalization) and spontaneity (horizontalism) in its effort to 'change governments'. That is, our era has been marked on the one hand by the counterhegemonic strategies of either rebuilding sovereignty over the national territory or working within the 'nonspaces' of transnational capital, and on the other hand by the spontaneist practices of protest, occupation, and the establishment of temporary autonomous zones. But in none of these left-wing strategies does the possibility of an innovative territorial production actually appear, as all are ultimately attempts to occupy, reproduce, or at best redistribute the given territory. If, as Claude Raffestin claims, "the production of territories by means of territories is the operation of the creation and recreation of values" (Raffestin and Butler, 2012, page 131), how is it then that through the acceptance of the given territory these strategies will somehow overcome the values of capitalism? It is in this context that the singular contribution of the Zapatistas' efforts might best be appreciated. For them, it is only through the long and arduous process of enacting the explicitly antiseparatist yet simultaneously territorial strategy of building other geographies that a rather different left might today 'change worlds', abandoning capitalist value and in effect 'ending this world'. Although some within the left (in Mexico and globally) will find the Zapatistas' strategy an uncomfortable impediment to their counterhegemonic aspirations, and others may sincerely disagree with their analysis, it behooves no one to do so by simply wishing them dead. We must instead open the discussion, as they clearly have, of what it actually means to be on the left today.

Endnotes

(1) For leaked excerpts of the counterinsurgency plan against the EZLN in 1994, see Carlos Marin (1998).

(2) XENK Radio 620, "Política de Banqueta", Transcription here:

<http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2006/07/05/radio-insurgente-en-el-df-donde-se-da-informacion-sobre-las-elecciones-del-2-de-julio/>

(3) For just one first-hand account of the thesis of the EZLN's disappearance within Mexico's 'progressive' intellectual circles, see Raul Zibechi (2012).

(4) Even the Anglophone academic world was not untouched by the perception of the EZLN as a spent force. Take, for example, the widely circulated words of David Harvey, who, even half a decade after the Zapatistas' break with the Mexican political class, concluded (with thinly veiled disappointment) that the Zapatistas had given up on political revolution and instead decided to "remain a movement within the state" (2010, page 252).

(5) For a good summary of Article 27's provisions for the protection of common land tenure, see Ana de Ita (2006, page 149).

(6) The most important of these programs was PROCEDE (Certification Program for Ejidal Rights and Titling of Parcels). For an analysis of PROCEDE and its relation to the evisceration of Article 27, see de Ita (2006).

(7) For a similar argument regarding Article 27 of the Mexican constitution, see Gareth Williams (2011, pages 158-165).

(8) For a more detailed description of the Zapatista's alternative institutions, see Reyes and Kaufman (2012).

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Carlos Fazio: The Indigenous Council, Marichuy, and 2018

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In pre-electoral times and in the shadow of state fraud in the recent gubernatorial elections in Coahuila and the State of Mexico, the clock of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) marks the hour of the peoples in resistance: the hour of anticapitalist struggle, below and to the left, as a way to continue to build life which becomes word, learning, and collective agreements in the face of so much death, repression, and dispossession of territory and resources; of such destruction and barbarity.

In order to dismantle from below the power imposed by those above, the constitutive assembly of the Indigenous Governing Council (CIG), held in April at the University of the Earth in San Cristóbal de la Casas, Chiapas, took the first steps towards strengthening the fabric of collective organization of nations, tribes, and originary peoples in rebellion at a national scale. This effort takes the form of a self-governing body constituted as a single council which is coordinated to represent all the struggles and resistances that oppose the capitalist privatizing offensive that has militarized and paramilitarized the territories where they live.

More than 1,252 representatives of indigenous peoples and communities and 230 delegates from the EZLN participated in the assembly, and as a show of their maturity and awareness of the necessity of unity, decided to create a council as a collective form of government, a form of direct democracy in which the peoples are the protagonist. The Indigenous Council embodies a project of democratic, horizontal, assembly-based organization in which everyone [*todas y todos*] discusses and decides; as differentiated, of course, from the empty shell of liberal representative democracy which these days in Mexico displays the exhaustion of the electoral path.

In the short and medium term, the council seeks to curb the counterinsurgent war of expansionist, criminal, and militarized capitalism and to preserve the life of the peoples in resistance in the face of the violent dispossession of lands, forests, water, communal resources, and all that which is threatened by the megaprojects of the owners of money.

Definitively, this is about the defense of a mode of living and being, of relating to mother earth, which is threatened by mining and hydrocarbon projects, by the big energy corporations in their hydraulic, wind, and solar modes, and by water privatization and new infrastructure projects in the so-called Special Economic Zones (ZEE). These, with their epicenter in the isthmus of Tehuantepec, will open a new phase of accumulation through neocolonial displacement and dispossession of territories where forms of communal and ejidal property survive.

By decision of the assembly, an indigenous Nahuatl woman, a traditional medic and herbalist, María de Jesús Patricio (Marichuy), who is 54 years old and from Tuxpan, Jalisco, will be the spokesperson of the Indigenous Governing Council and candidate for the presidency of the Republic.

According to the racist and classist perspective of some turncoats on the clientelist, electoralist, and parliamentarist left who think that indigenous people should not interrupt those spaces considered the exclusive domain of a political class cum mafia, the unity of the left can only be achieved by attaching oneself, in subaltern and apolitical fashion, to a political party. Those who would classify the indigenous initiative as divisive can rest easy: you can't divide that which doesn't exist in the parliamentary realm. What's more, Marichuy will not tour the country in pursuit of votes, because the struggle of the CNI and the EZLN is not for power. They do not intend to compete with the parties and their politicians, but rather to put indignation, resistance, and rebellion on the ballot in 2018.

The spokespersonship of this woman, who is herself an important reference point in Tuxpan among both Nahuas and mestizos, will be dedicated to calling the indigenous peoples and civil society to organize themselves with autonomy to confront militarized capitalism without falling into electoralism, and to spur on an autonomy which has education, justice, and self-government as its axes. Her campaign will seek to denounce and make visible the pain and obscurity of the ordinary peoples, and to create and multiply dignified forms of resistance to the bad government—whose army and police are in bed with or accomplices of *narcoparamilitarism*—and its bosses, the owners of the large corporations who murder, disappear, enslave, dispossess, loot, destroy, and pollute in their predatory offensive.

The initiative of an independent candidacy, which has been discussed in the heart of 43 indigenous peoples and 523 communities in 25 states of the country since last October, derives from a collective thought process, from a historic practice of the indigenous peoples

and nations which have used different strategies of struggle to ensure their continuity and autonomy.

At the margins of the dominant party-ocracy, those political subjects who have been made invisible and historically denied their capacity for decision-making, political action, and ideating an inclusive project, today push forward an alternative to the system of hegemonic representation which is delegitimized and in crisis. They seek to build a new, emancipatory horizon and to cement a power of those below and to the left with a candidacy that questions the monopoly on politics and societal representation by the professionals of the electoralist institutionalized parties.

They will attempt to deepen a national movement to confront non-violently the transnational capitalist class with its unjust structures of exploitation and domination. But at the same time, in the context of multiple forms of state violence bearing the seal of corruption, impunity and simulation as tools of the recolonization of territories, the proposal seeks to open a path to peace. The problem, then, is not to vote or not; the problem is capitalism. And faced with capital's culture of death, the path ahead is that of organized resistance.

Gilberto Lopez y Rivas: Seven reasons to support the proposal of the CNI-EZLN

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Since the publication of the proposal agreed upon by the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) to form an Indigenous Governing Council for Mexico whose spokeswoman will be registered as an independent candidate for the presidential elections in 2018, many adherents to the Sixth Declaration [of the Lacandón Jungle] have set ourselves the task of participating in workshops, public forums, and round-table discussions to reflect upon, analyze, present, and of course debate this singular political act in its multiple dimensions, challenges, and commitments.

This is one more initiative to come out of the indigenous world, and in particular, of Zapatismo and its immediate allies, with the objective of articulating resistances from below and to the left in order to confront that storm of civilizatory import which constitutes contemporary capitalist globalization and which is expressed in the form of a recolonization and a war of conquest of territories, natural resources, disposable human beings, as well as the destruction of nature. This recolonization and war of conquest are hurtling the human species and all known life forms towards possible extinction. That is, the current struggle of the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples exceeds the frameworks of left and right, which are by now well-worn and emptied of all content, and situates itself in the dichotomous position of being for life or for death. Rosa Luxembourg, who did not live the nightmare of

Nazi-fascism nor the current form of criminal and militarized capitalist accumulation, more than a century ago had already laid out the disjuncture of socialism or barbarism.

In this context, what are some of the reasons to take up as one's own the proposal of the CNI-EZLN?:

1. It is an idea that has been discussed in depth by the Mayan Zapatista communities, and later by the more than 40 originary peoples that make up the CNI. It is not the fruit of a group of notables who think for everyone else, but rather the result of the horizontal deliberations of innumerable assemblies that analyzed the proposal until arriving at its approval, under one of the principles of "govern by obeying": convince, don't defeat. It is not the random fancy of a single person, nor does it have hidden promoters within the government that the institutional left and the "anonimati" of the social networks can denounce.
2. The formation of an Indigenous Governing Council for Mexico is supported by several decades of de-facto experiences of autonomy across the whole geography of our haggard national territory, which contrast notably with the corrupt, delegitimized and discredited governments on all three levels and all three powers of the party-ocracy, which have produced an enormous weariness among the citizenry and a profound crisis of so-called representative democracy. It is evident that the group currently in power does not represent the interests of the Mexican people and the nation, and they are in fact nationally traitorous governments that have given up the exercise of sovereignty and turned over the country, its territory, workforce, and natural and strategic resources to transnational capitalist corporations, docilely submitting to the economic, political, ideological, and military domination of the United States, the hegemonic armed wing of world imperialism. The Indigenous Governing Council and what may result from it are the embryo of popular-national representation and sovereignty, based on the provisions of Article 39 of the Constitution, which is still in effect.
3. The Governing Council and the independent candidacy of the compañera María de Jesús Patricio Martínez originate in the sector of the exploited, the oppressed, and the discriminated-against, which has for decades forged a strategy of resistance against capitalism: autonomy, which institutes, in turn, a practice of government and political action which is radically different from the one we know, without bureaucracies, intermediaries, professional politicians or local strongmen. Despite structural precarity, the counter-insurgent war of attrition, paramilitaries, organized crime, repression, and the criminalization of their struggles, these autonomous governments have demonstrated their capacity to organize peoples in a process of reconstitution, consciousness-raising, participation of women and young people, and strengthening of ethno-cultural, national, and class identities through the collective and autonomous appropriation of community safety, health, education, culture, communication, productive and economic activity, and the carrying-out of justice, as well as the defense

of territory and natural resources.

4. In a country in which the corruption and generalized cynicism of the political class reign, the indigenous proposal is based on the notable ethical congruence of its backers. The EZLN as well as the CNI have for decades practiced what they preach, and they have made real the principles of not selling out, not giving in, not betraying, and not supplanting nor taking advantage of others' struggles. The slogan "for everyone, everything; for us, nothing" has been a reality throughout all these years. These organizations have been establishing the popular power of "govern by obeying" without asking anything in return and, despite their difficult life conditions, they have been in solidarity with all the struggles of those below.
5. The candidacy of an indigenous woman goes beyond a politics of quotas and feminist positions that don't take into account the triple oppression that indigenous women have suffered and the cultural specificity within which they demand full rights. It is situated as a clear response to the reigning patriarcalism, a gender politics of a new breed, whose origins can be found in the EZLN's Revolutionary Law for Women.
6. It is an inclusive proposal, not just of and with the indigenous peoples, which takes up as its own the reivindications of all the exploited, oppressed and discriminated people on earth, regardless of their ethno-national origins and cultural characteristics. It is not an essentialist or ethnicist proposal. Its addressees are all the peoples of Mexico, including that of the majority nationality. It is that world in which we all fit.
7. The initiative does not divide the institutional left. As Paulina Fernández points out, the initiative exposes it, and I would add, exposes it in all its racism and misery.