

COLECCIÓN AL FARO ZAPATISTA

An Overview of Zapatismo

Carlos Alonso Reynoso and Jorge Alonso



AL FARO ZAPATISTA COLLECTION

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Radical Ecological Democracy

Searching for alternatives to unsustainable and inequitable model of 'development'

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Hecho en Chiapas, México / *Made in Chiapas, Mexico*

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AN OVERVIEW OF ZAPATISMO

Carlos Alonso Reynoso and Jorge Alonso

The Zapatismo born in Chiapas has been a complex process with many different stages and adjustments. Since its first public appearance, in the early hours of 1994, until 2021, it has been characterized by its originality and its great capacity to constantly innovate.¹ This movement has shaken the usual certainties surrounding democracy and shed light upon new forms of doing politics to build, day-by-day, a world where many worlds fit. There have been efforts to circumscribe it within the regional sphere, but it has broken all fences that have tried to enclose it with actions and thoughts that have had a great impact on the entire planet. We will provide an overview of its historical development, as well as a first reflection to highlight the importance placed on the defence of life by the movement.

¹ The information in this text comes from the webpage <<https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/>> and from our book (see Alonso and Alonso 2015). In it you can find bibliographic references on the EZLN.

From Public Appearance to the Formation of the Zapatista Front of National Liberation

In the First Declaration of the Lacandon Forest, Zapatismo declared war on the Mexican government and demanded work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace. After a number of unequal battles, in which the Mexican army attacked communities in Chiapas, Mexican civil society took to the streets to demand a pacific solution to the Zapatista demands. Zapatismo agreed to sit at the table and negotiate for peace, and called upon civil society to form a peace cordon around the dialogue.

The Zapatistas announced that they would hold a previous consultation in their communities to review the government document. In mid-1994, they issued the Second Declaration of the Lacandon Forest, in which they proposed—amongst other things—a reformulation of the problem of power, freedom and justice, to give birth to a new political culture. In August, they called the National Democratic Convention and, towards the end of that year, the legislative power established a Commission for Dialogue and Mediation for Peace. Zapatismo broke the military siege that attempted to drown it and revealed the existence of 38 autonomous municipalities. Upon the first anniversary of its appearance, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) issued its Third Declaration of the Lacandon Forest, in which it suggested that civil society build a national liberation movement. In 1995, another session of the National Democratic Convention was held in the city of Querétaro.

The government tried to apprehend the Zapatista leadership; the army attacked the Zapatista communities, which withdrew to the mountains. Once again, civil society demanded that the government return to the dialogue table and call off the arrest warrants. This forced the legislative and executive powers to agree to a Law for Dialogue, Conciliation and Dignified Peace.

Halfway through that year, civil society held a national consultation for peace and democracy. In August, Zapatismo organized the “First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism” (Primer Encuentro Intercontinental por la Humanidad y Contra el Neoliberalismo), attended by thousands of people from around the world. In October, the peace dialogues in San Andrés Larráinzar resumed.

In 1996, the Zapatistas issued the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Forest, where they proposed the construction of a new type of politics, one that was not based on political parties, that did not fight for power, and was independent, autonomous and peaceful. Five hundred representatives from 35 indigenous peoples managed to reach consensus on important issues, and the National Indigenous Congress was founded (Congreso Nacional Indígena, CNI). The Zapatistas and the government signed the so-called San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture, and the government committed to recognizing indigenous rights in the Constitution. The second process of dialogue on democracy and justice was launched, but the government called it off.

Comandanta Ramona travelled to Mexico City and made a speech in which she emphasized a demand of the indigenous

peoples: "Never again a Mexico without us." One thousand one hundred and eleven Zapatistas travelled around the country in 1997 to promote the creation of the Zapatista Front of National Liberation (Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional). The world was outraged by the massacre of 45 Tzotzil people, mostly women and children, perpetrated by a paramilitary group in Acteal.

The Fifth Declaration of the Lacandon Forest was issued in 1998. In it, the Zapatistas stressed the fact that they persisted and they resisted. They pointed out that they had kept their word of seeking a peaceful solution, but the government had not. They responded to the war waged against them from above with dignified and silent resistance and demanded an indigenous law that corresponded to the hopes of the indigenous peoples. They specified that, although it did not incorporate all the San Andrés Accords, they accepted the draft law submitted by the Bicameral Concord and Conciliation Commission (Cocopa). It was the time of the indigenous peoples, of civil society, and of the Congress of the Union.

In 1999, the EZLN announced a consultation on the recognition of indigenous rights. The Zapatistas also posited the convenience of holding an international consultation for the recognition of the rights of native peoples and for putting an end to the war of extermination, and they called for the celebration of an international day of the excluded of the world. The Zapatistas organized another consultation with civil society, to which over two thousand delegates from around the country responded.



March of Zapatista militiamen and women and insurgents on the 25th anniversary of the “War against Oblivion,” Caracol La Realidad, Chiapas, 2018. Photo: Francisco De Parres Gómez.

From the Betrayal of the State to the Deepening and Consolidation of Zapatista Autonomy

When the PAN candidate won the presidency in 2000, he promised to settle the indigenous issue quickly, something he did not do during his entire six-year term. At the end of April 2001, the Senate and the House of Representatives of Mexico approved a deceitful Law of Indigenous Rights and Culture. With this law, the state turned its back on the entirety of the accords assumed by the indigenous peoples. This legislation was immediately rejected by the EZLN and the CNI, for it did not acknowledge indigenous communities as public law bodies, and the concept of territory, which was crucial for the understanding and definition of autonomy, had disappeared from the legal text. The Zapatistas declared themselves clandestine, in resistance and rebellion. Zapatismo focused on strengthening autonomy in its municipalities.

At the dawn of 2003, around 20 000 indigenous Zapatistas from 40 autonomous municipalities symbolically occupied the town of San Cristóbal de Las Casas wearing balaclavas and bearing machetes. Amongst them there were *comandantes* and *comandantas*. The Zapatistas showed without a shadow of a doubt that they expected nothing from the state or political parties. They strengthened their autonomous municipalities and created the so-called *Caracoles*, the headquarters of the territory organized by the five Juntas de Buen Gobierno in the autonomous municipalities. Each Caracol included a specific number of autonomous municipalities within a regional organization. They were entrusted with the important mission of *ruling by obeying*. They were to

solve problems arising within the communities and serve as bridges between the communities and the world. In 2003, the Zapatistas invited civil society to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the creation of the EZLN and the tenth anniversary of its armed uprising.

In mid-2005, the Zapatistas issued the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Forest. In it, they explained that new generations had renovated the entire organization, making it stronger. The EZLN had resisted twelve years of war, of military, paramilitary, political, ideological, and economic attacks, twelve years of harassment and persecution. They hoped to unite struggles that they saw were fought separately. According to what they heard and learned in the process, they would construct a national programme of struggle on the left: anticapitalist and antineoliberal; they would try to construct or reconstruct another way of doing politics. The EZLN announced that a delegation would travel under its direction across the entire Mexican territory for an indefinite period of time to see this through. It declared that it would establish a policy of alliances with non-electoral organizations and movements that defined themselves as left-wing on the following conditions: that they would not make agreements above to be imposed below, but would agree to walk side by side, to listen and to organize indignation; that they would not spur movements that would then be negotiated behind the backs of their participants; that they would always take into account the opinion of the participants; that they would not seek presents, positions, advantages, public offices; that they would go beyond electoral calendars; that they would not try to solve the problems of Mexico from above, but rather build

an alternative from below and for below. In this declaration, Zapatismo pointed out that neoliberalism was putting on practice the idea that capitalism was free to rule the world.

The Zapatistas set out to create more relations based on respect and mutual support with persons and organizations that resisted and struggled against neoliberalism. They officially launched the National Campaign for Another Politics, for a National Programme of Left Struggle and for a New Constitution. As the name was very long, they opted for the abbreviation The Other Campaign (*La Otra Campaña*). In August and September of that year, they invited to their territory the most plural and diverse fractions of the fragmented struggles against neoliberalism. They organized six sectoral meetings and one plenary. The Zapatista *comandantas* used their initial interventions to defend women's rights. The Other Campaign tried to shake the country from below to unveil the multiple forms of dispossession, contempt, and exploitation. The journey began with the intention of visiting the entire country. Then came the brutal repression in Atenco, and the tour was suspended so that the participants could stay there to struggle for the liberation of the political prisoners.

A seminar was held in 2007 that brought together a large number of intellectuals from the global left. Furthermore, the "Third Encounter of the Zapatista Peoples with the Peoples of the World" (*Tercer Encuentro de los Pueblos Zapatistas con los Pueblos del Mundo*), an international meeting exclusively for women, was held in *Caracol La Garrucha*. In 2008, the international festival Dignified Rage (*La Digna Rabia*) became a locus to analyze capitalism and its crisis and to highlight the importance of building

alternatives. It was stressed that the struggle was not only for a fair society but for the salvation of life on the planet.

Zapatismo has posited that war is inherent to capitalism and that the struggle for peace is anticapitalist. At the end of 2012, 40 000 indigenous Zapatistas marched in silence and symbolically occupied five towns in Chiapas. Those in power had tried to show that the Zapatistas were debilitated, and this was proof of the contrary. The Zapatistas disclosed how the autonomous authorities of the Juntas and their municipalities were appointed. An assembly was held, which chose directly the *compañeros* that were to carry out the labour of self-government. The authorities were put to the test when called to solve any arising problems. No law was imposed. There were different areas in the autonomous government (education, trade, health, communication, justice, transport, projects and agrarian issues, and administration). They also made it clear that there were collective plots for growing beans and maize, livestock collectives, shop collectives, and chicken collectives in the villages. Small businesses did exist; not permanent businesses with a specific location but, when small events were organized, the *compañeros* would go with their small business. The Juntas presented monthly detailed reports of all that they managed with sincerity and honesty, and there were many internal controls.

The so-called Zapatista Little School (Escuelita Zapatista) was established in 2013, asserting that all that was required was a willingness to observe and to learn. The place of teaching-learning was the community. There were no teachers; the teaching was done by the collective. As it took place in the communities, the students lived with

the families, partook in the work in the fields and ate with the families. It was stressed that the particularity of the Zapatista people was not only that they had challenged the powerful or kept up rebellion and resistance for 20 years; above all, it was that they had managed to construct the Zapatista indigenous definition of freedom: to govern and be governed according to their ways, their geography, and their calendar. They did not approach the students with a predefined model or a manual for the construction of freedom. What was learned was the shape of the autonomous government built by the Zapatistas. There were three levels: the communities, the autonomous municipalities, and the Juntas de Buen Gobierno. They were spaces to share opinions, discuss, and make decisions, always taking into account seven principles: to obey, not command (to take into account the people's opinion); to represent, not supplant (the representative takes into account that which the people are saying); to work from below, not seek to rise (the authorities practice this in a simple way, thinking of the people); to serve others, not serve oneself (the authorities serve the people); to convince, not defeat (the authorities must analyse their proposals before making contact with the people); to construct, not destroy (they are careful with their words); to propose, not impose (they study and analyse before proposing and hold assemblies to reach decisions).

The Zapatistas aspire to collaborate in the construction of a world where many worlds fit. They are building their autonomy in a way that allows a place for all men, women, children, and elders. There is no ruling authority in any of the government entities, an entire group is in charge. The people determine each proposal, each need, they are the

ultimate governing and leading authority; everyone decides. The crucial element in Zapatista democracy is that the autonomous authorities are appointed in assemblies, they are revocable and periodically renewed, so that everyone can learn to be an authority stemming from the people. Many ideas emerge in each assembly, and not all can be accomplished. The best outcome is consensus; however, if consensus is not reached, there is a vote, and the winning proposal is adopted; the promoters of the losing proposal accept this outcome. Democracy is exercised in the smallest details. Opinions are voiced and decisions are made constantly. Thus, the Zapatistas live this other democracy, the autonomous and not the official one. The people rule and the government obeys. Everything is consulted with the communities. The peoples decide on health, education, the economy. They know that, if the people can make mistakes, they can also correct them.

While for capitalism land is a commodity, Zapatismo defends it, and with collective work autonomy comes alive. The Zapatistas solve everything through direct action, and they do not want anything from the government. Furthermore, they have shown that they accomplish what they set out to do. They have been improving their resistance. A way of resisting is through the preservation of their craftwork; they put a lot of effort in preserving indigenous customs. Camaraderie and collectivism are promoted at school amongst children, and solutions are sought through agreement. The Zapatistas make every effort to ensure that justice is not corrupted, let alone sold out. If someone is guilty, there will be punishment; however, it will not be in the form of money, but through collective work. There are

no written regulations. Each zone has its own forms, and the punishment depends on the severity of the crime. The problems that cannot be solved at the local level are referred to the autonomous municipalities. They know that everything has a solution, and that this solution must be sought. The autonomous governments can solve problems among Zapatistas but also between a Zapatista and a non-Zapatista, provided the persons concerned agree to take their case before them. The authority listens attentively to understand who is right and never receives money for this task, for justice cannot be sold or rented, and no crime is invented.

The Zapatista women have also come a long way and can now be found at all three levels of government. They reflect that they are free, as they participate in the assemblies at all three levels of government. They experienced difficulties in making men understand that women can participate, study, and hold a position. There are women agents, education and health coordinators, and others holding positions in community radios. Women also participate in the autonomous municipalities and the Juntas de Buen Gobierno. They have understood that one learns through governing, and self-government has been a school. Women's opinions are heard at the three levels, and they have shown their commitment. In Zapatismo, women govern together with the men; they emphasize that they do not govern separately, that it is a collective effort. Men and women drive autonomy together. The Zapatista women have the courage to govern, and they want everyone who listens to them to know that this courage lies within all women. They govern because they think. Women are working and participating, this is what goes on in the communities. The

Zapatista communities assert that those who have advanced the most in the collectives of production and commerce are the women. The Zapatistas wanted women to be born and raised without the fear of violence, harassment, persecution, contempt, exploitation. Zapatismo wanted to build a world where women are born and raised without fear. That other, new world must abandon patriarchy and toxic masculinity in order to open up to the dynamism of fully respected women.

With the new phase of Zapatismo, the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) was reactivated in 2013, acknowledging, supporting, and encouraging the struggles for autonomy and free determination of all indigenous peoples. At the beginning of 2014, Zapatismo celebrated the 20th anniversary of its first public appearance. In the course of these twenty years, the Zapatistas have realized that freedom involves autonomy, radical democracy, and the struggle for a life with dignity and justice. At the end of March 2014, the Zapatistas announced activities with indigenous peoples, a homage to Luis Villoro, and an international seminar on ethics in the face of dispossession. On the last week of May, there would be a meeting in one of the Caracoles of native peoples and thirty indigenous organizations. They announced that, after that, they would invite other native peoples of Mexico and the world. In an open act, they would announce the next steps in the struggle against dispossession. On the first of June, the Zapatistas would hold a tribute to don Luis, and from the 2nd to the 8th of June they would host a seminar with the participation of world-famous artists and intellectuals. There, the EZLN would reveal a proposed initiative for all the national and international Sixth.

In an effort to prevent this, the government launched a bloody paramilitary attack on Caracol La Realidad at the beginning of May. They wrecked the autonomous school, destroyed a water-supply pipe, and murdered one of the teachers of the *Escuelita Zapatista*, known by his *compañeros* and *compañeras* as Galeano. The Zapatistas announced that, because of the events, they had decided to suspend indefinitely the meeting and sharing with the native peoples and their organizations in the CNI, the planned tribute to don Luis Villoro, and their participation in the seminar called "Ethics in the Face of Dispossession" that artists and intellectuals from Mexico and the world were organizing. A new cycle of the *Escuelita Zapatista* was also postponed. Tribute was paid to Galeano. The global response to this murder was quick, forceful and massive. The Zapatistas had established that to enter into dialogue with the political class was pointless, for which they now conversed with the people from below and to the left; the *Escuelita Zapatista* had been an important experience in this context. The Zapatistas did not aim at taking power, nor did they participate in the elections. They struggled so that the people could choose their own path.

Subcomandante Marcos spoke as Marcos for the last time on the 25th of May. He made it clear that it was a collective decision and that it had not been an easy one. He affirmed that, against death, the Zapatistas demand life; against silence, they demand the word and respect; against oppression, they offered rebellion; against crime, they demanded justice; against imposition, they demanded democracy; against slavery, they proclaimed freedom. When they appeared 20 years ago, they understood that their dilemma

was not to negotiate or to fight, but rather to die or to live. Their choice was not to develop soldiers, but to prepare promoters of education and health, laying the foundations for autonomy. He recalled that, on the 21st of December 2012, thousands of faceless men and women silently took the buildings where the alleged disappearance of Zapatismo was being celebrated, whereas not only had it not been weakened, but had grown quantitatively and qualitatively. The Zapatistas chose rebellion, that is to say, life. It was said that they had not gained privileges for themselves, and that was true, for the catchphrase “nothing for ourselves” was not a mere slogan, but a reality. He pointed out that, if congruence is a sign of failure, then incongruity is the path to success, the road to power.

After 20 years, a multiple and complex handoff or change was taking place within Zapatismo. The first change was generational, for those who had been very young or had not yet been born in 1994 were now fighting and leading the resistance. Then there was a replacement of a *mestizo* leadership with a purely indigenous one. There was a change of thought, for there had been a shift from revolutionary vanguardism to ruling by obeying, from taking power from above to creating power from below, forgetting professional politics and turning to everyday politics. Zapatismo had also undergone another change: from gender-based marginalization to the direct participation of women. Also, there had been a shift from mocking the “other” to celebrating difference. There was a government of the people without specialists in governance.

Another handoff had to do with the fact that an indigenous person was now the spokesperson and leader. Marcos

confessed that he had to learn to see this world that was now walking with its own step. He was emphatic in that they had not deceived anyone from below. The EZLN did not conceal the fact that, as an army, they had a pyramid structure, a centre of command. However, theirs had not been an army that supplanted or imposed. Marcos stressed that, for better or for worse, nothing they had done would have been possible without the EZLN; that, as warriors, they knew what their role and their moment was. He regretted the fact that, in 1994, people had not seen that it was indigenous people rebelling; all they had seen was a *mestizo* in a ski mask. He explained how the idea that he should be the spokesperson had emerged: the indigenous rebels said that they had to create someone who people could see and, through him, see them. Thus, indigenous wisdom challenged modernity in one of its bastions: the media. The indigenous built a character called Marcos, who they turned into a distraction so that the Zapatistas could be seen as what they are. Ironically, Marcos summarized by saying that, if he had to define Marcos, he would have to say he was a ruse or a hologram. He acknowledged that they had made a few mistakes in constructing and maintaining the character; however, they had always thought about how to use this hologram. He complained that, as the handoff advanced, they had met people who wanted to lead them or be led by them. Others wanted to use them. He recalled that different initiatives had been launched trying to find the gaze or the ear they needed. He stressed that the Sixth Declaration was the most audacious and most Zapatista of their initiatives. He highlighted the initiative of the course “freedom according to the Zapatistas.” When

they saw that there was a generation that could look at the Zapatistas head-on, listen to them and talk to them without expecting guidance or leadership, submission or following, they understood that the character of Marcos was no longer necessary. He specified that the handoff was not taking place due to illness or death, nor because of an internal displacement, purge or purification, but rather due to the changes occurring within the EZLN.

The Zapatistas had shown that their conviction and practice was that one could fight without leaders or commanders. Marcos forcefully said that, just as the Zapatistas had created this character, they were now destroying it. With his death, Galeano had marked the calendar. He united his name with those of many others in Mexico and the world. He said that Galeano had been an extraordinary person, as many in the Zapatista communities are, and that they shared the same destiny: freedom. By killing Galeano, those above wanted to kill Zapatismo; but the Zapatistas decided to exhume him, and for Galeano to live, the character of Marcos had to die. The Zapatistas had unanimously decided that, from that moment on, Marcos ceased to exist. Their task was to continue to fight for freedom, democracy, and justice. He posited that he who never was here does not leave. And he closed as *Subcomandante* Galeano, before an overwhelming reaction acknowledging the rebirth of a collective Galeano. Once the enormous display of solidarity had shifted the situation in favour of Zapatismo, at the end of May, *Subcomandante* Moisés became the main spokesperson and announced that the *Escuelita Zapatista* would resume its operation.



Dance of the Zapatista bases during the 1st Dance Festival “Dance Another World” (Báilate Otro Mundo), Caracol Tulan Ka’u, Chiapas, 2019. Photo: Francisco De Parres Gómez.

Critical Thought Against Capitalism

The Zapatistas continued to organize their autonomy and resistance. Towards the end of 2014, delegates of the CNI and the EZLN announced that the peoples, tribes, and nations had agreed to hold what they called the “First World Festival of Resistance and Rebellion Against Capitalism” (Primer Festival Mundial de las Resistencias y las Rebeldías Contra el Capitalismo). After sharing their own experiences, they proposed the slogan “Where those above destroy, we below rebuild.” The novelty envisaged by Zapatismo lies in the attitude of what they call *compartición* (sharing). When the people share with each other the aggressions they suffer, they realize that they are not facing individual problems, but rather a general dynamic of dispossession. By comparing their experiences, they find ways to proceed with a vital and non-isolated resistance. The practice of listening that is then multiplied in many communities allows for the analysis of common problems and the search for solutions that are not only local, but regional, national, and even international.

In May 2015, Zapatismo organized a seminar called “Critical Thought against the Capitalist Hydra.” They spoke of a catastrophe they could see coming, which could not be confronted with the usual methods of struggle. They described the transition of capitalism from its industrial form to financial speculation, which acted in the threshold between legality and illegality. Financial interests were promoting *World War IV*, most people were working in conditions of precarity, there was a dislocation of capital, the welfare state would not come back, and the nation-state

could no longer play the role of regulator. Capital and humanity were settling the score; and there was a need to build another geography, another calendar, and other, non-capitalist social relations.

They specified that capitalism was not an indestructible wall, for there were already cracks on its surface. They pointed out that the growing crisis had to do with the fact that capitalism had turned that which is basic and elementary—water, air, light—into commodities. And to those who said that there were only two roads to governing, through either weapons or votes, they answered that there were other options: to organize and unite the organizations for a world where the people rule and the governments obey.

The Zapatistas called for the multiplication of exchanges and of seedbeds, where ideas were planted which then grew and produced the desired change. Each person had to go back to their place and organize, grow, and deepen the crack on the wall. In the face of the disaster of capitalism, the answer was defence through organization. In Zapatismo, the communities proudly claim to be Mexican, for they share stories, joys, pains and struggles with other indigenous peoples and with the broad and diverse below of Mexico. Zapatismo stresses the meaning of justice, morality, ethics, and fraternity.

At the beginning of 2016, Zapatismo commemorated the 22nd anniversary of its insurrection. The Zapatistas highlighted that their struggle was not local, not even national, but rather universal, for the injustice, crimes, dispossessions, contempt, exploitation were also universal. And so were rebelliousness, rage, dignity, and the desire to improve. The Zapatistas are convinced that they must

construct their life by themselves, with autonomy. They listen to pain and suffering near and far, for those who truly rule under capitalism are not only set on continuing to exploit, repress, disrespect, and dispossess, but are determined to destroy the entire world if in doing so they can profit.



Artists from the support bases after their appearance in the 1st Dance Festival “Dance Another World” (Báilate Otro Mundo), Caracol Tulan Ka’u, Chiapas, 2019. Photo: Francisco De Parres Gómez.

The Emergence of the Indigenous Governing Council and the Journey Around the World

Towards the end of 2016, the EZLN and the CNI launched a broad consultation on the convenience of creating an Indigenous Governing Council (Concejo Indígena de Gobierno, CIG), which would have a woman as its spokesperson and would be candidate to President of the Republic in the 2018 elections. This initiative did not aim at taking power, but at bringing together all the discontented in order to end capitalist destruction and build a new nation for all.

While the people were being consulted on this audacious proposal, at the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017, the Zapatistas organized a novel meeting with scientists; they said they wanted to understand the world, for only understanding it could they create a new and better world. At the end of that year, the Fifth Congress of the CNI was held, in which the results of the internal consultation with the communities were reviewed. Forty-three indigenous peoples had finally agreed to create a CIG with representatives (one woman and one man) from each of the peoples, tribes, and nations that constituted it. On the 23rd anniversary of its uprising, Zapatismo observed that in 2017 the people of Mexico were worst-off than when the EZLN had shouted *Ya Basta*, Enough! The participation in the 2018 presidential elections with an independent candidate was not an invitation to compete for the power of those who are above, but to take advantage of the process to enable the peoples and collectives from below to renovate their resistance and rebellion through organization. There was a need to unite the struggles from below and

create a defence in the face of all the dispossession and destruction. They named their spokeswoman. Those above prevented the spokeswoman, who struggled to appear in the presidential ballot, from achieving it by putting as many hurdles in her way as possible. However, what is important is that the presidential campaign provided the opportunity to visit the entire country, every little corner, so that those from below could communicate their pains, understand that the root of all evil was capitalism, and try to link their struggles, thus strengthening them.

In its 24th anniversary, Zapatismo affirmed that capitalism was the system of death. The Zapatistas, on the contrary, fought for life. They invited all sectors of people working in the fields and in the cities, indigenous people, peasants, teachers, students, housewives, artists, traders, employees, manual labourers, doctors, intellectuals, and scientists to organize and to unite. They urged them to not give up, not sell out, and not give in. They were struggling for true democracy, freedom and justice.

The first international encounter of politics, arts, and sports of women who struggle took place in March 2018. After that, a roundtable discussion or seedbed was held under the name of “To Watch, to Listen, to Speak” (Miradas, Escuchas y Palabras). Upon the conclusion of the electoral process, an encounter of the CIG support networks and the celebration of the 15th anniversary of the Zapatista Caracoles was held. The Zapatistas ratified their disagreement with the winning candidate, who presented himself as left-wing but was not. He wanted to impose a singular thought as his government programme, but Zapatismo kept up its rebellion. The EZLN, CNI, and CIG pronounced

themselves against the airport megaproject announced by the new government and asserted their solidarity with the migrant populations. They organized the celebration of the 25th anniversary and an encounter of the CIG support networks in order to evaluate all that had happened during the electoral process. The Zapatistas recalled that, 25 years back, they were alone when they rose up to wake up the world and its people, and that at this moment they were also alone. They had invited those below to organize, and some were doing it, but most had not taken notice. The Zapatistas would defend what they had built. They were against the capitalist megaprojects promoted by the new government.

In February, the CNI-CIG and the EZLN condemned the murder of a social militant that had opposed the megaprojects in the state of Morelos. Days of action were organized under the title of “Zapata Lives, Samir Lives, the Struggle Continues” (“Zapata Vive, Samir Vive, la Lucha Sigue”). They raised their voices against the violence unleashed upon the indigenous peoples. Halfway through the year, they showed that the efforts to impose a siege on them had failed and that they had created 11 new Caracoles, adding up to a total of 16 together with the already existing ones. The original 27 autonomous municipalities had gone up to 43 and the Zapatista territory had expanded. They organized the Second International Encounter of Women who Struggle (Segundo Encuentro Internacional de Mujeres que Luchan). They held the Forum in Defence of Territory and Mother Earth (Foro en Defensa del Territorio y la Madre Tierra). They celebrated their 26th anniversary. Although they claimed they were very few, the truth is

that the Zapatistas were more and more as time went by. Schools and clinics flourished in their communities. They were willing to die in defence of the Land. A week later, Zapatismo, the CNI, the CIG, the peoples, communities, collectives, networks, organizations, and a great number of councils and assemblies convened the Days in Defence of Territory and Mother Earth with the name “We are all Samir” (Samir Somos Todas y Todos). In February, they launched mobilizations and activities. In March, the Zapatista women joined the national strike called by women’s movements on the 9th of March.

In mid-March, the EZLN closed down the Caracoles due to the pandemic and made a call to not abandon the struggle. In October they spoke again, saying that they see and hear a socially sick world, fragmented into efforts for individual survival, but united under the oppression of a system that was destroying planet Earth in its pursuit of profit. The pandemic had revealed the vulnerabilities of humans and the stupidity of governments around the world. The people had to take to the streets to struggle for life. There were resistances and uprisings that refused to follow the system towards its collapse. They announced that various Zapatista delegations would set out to travel the world and to find that which made us equal. The first destination would be the European continent. They specified that they would reach this destination by sea, and would arrive at Madrid 500 years after the alleged conquest of what was known as Mexico. They would not seek offense, blame, or apology; they would say that they had not been conquered, that they continued to resist and to rebel. They would walk to tell the world that there was

room for everyone in their collective heart. The Zapatista delegations would consist mainly of women. They affirmed that, in the mountains of Southeastern Mexico, all of the worlds in the world have found, and still find, a listener in the Zapatista hearts. The Zapatista resistance and rebellion had been fed by their words and actions, and they saw that it was time to reciprocate. Therefore, the Zapatista delegations would begin their journey in the corners of Europe, from below and to the left.

The Fifth National Assembly of the CNI was held at the end of 2020. Upon its 26th anniversary, Zapatismo issued the declaration for life. They knew there were many differences, but there were also many things in common: the pain of the earth, violence against women, persecution and contempt for the different, genocide of indigenous people, racism, militarism, exploitation, dispossession, and the destruction of nature. The capitalist system was responsible for all these afflictions. The commitment had been assumed to struggle against the system, each one according to their geography and their way. They were certain that the struggle for humanity was global. They called to those who shared the same concerns and struggles to join the declaration for life. Many collectives from Insubmissive Europe invited them to go and converse with them. In 2021 there was a lot of organization for the journey. The Zapatista maritime delegation that set sail for the Port of Vigo was made up of four women of different ages, two men, and one *otroa*, who was to be the first one to set foot on European territory in what was a highly symbolic decision. If, half a millennium ago, the invaders had arrived from Europe to bring oppression and death to the indigenous

peoples, half a millennium later a Zapatista delegation made this journey in the opposite direction to bring life. The Zapatista delegations and the CNI stressed that their journey was for life.



Girl from support bases in the First Festival of “Dance Another World” (Báilate Otro Mundo), Caracol Tulan Ka’u, Chiapas, 2019. Photo: Francisco De Parres Gómez.

To Finish This Writing: A Look at a Complex and Interpellating Process

Zapatismo has managed to consistently amaze us, awaken us, and shake us into organizing and interweaving our struggles. Their words are radiant; their silences, deafening. Those of us who write this overview thought, at the moment of its appearance, that we were before a new Mexican revolution. However, it has gone beyond that, for it did not attempt to supplant old powers but rather to show that it was possible to build a totally different world right now, one that cares for human life and the planet. We have followed it, impressed by its teachings. It has forged a change in mentality which translates into actions. It has led to a profound *metanoia*.² From the beginning, Zapatismo posited that work, land, housing, food, health, education, justice, democracy, peace, and independence had to be joined by freedom. It stressed that its struggle is for freedom of thought and of walking. It proposed the method of walking while asking. At the beginning, the Zapatistas thought that electoral democracy could provide a solution, but they soon came up against evidence that elections were a path full of mines. In the San Andrés Accords, the state committed to guaranteeing the free determination of indigenous peoples, the capacity to freely decide on their internal form of government and their own ways of political, social, economic and cultural organization. From this perspective, autonomy and freedom walked hand in hand, and this became clearer and more

² A profound change in mentality that affects new forms of acting.

forceful as the events unfolded. However, the Mexican state betrayed the Accords. Zapatismo emphasized its dialogue with civil society, promoting various consultations in search of a fairer, more free, and more democratic Mexico. In practice, Zapatismo became increasingly aware of the fact that the autonomy exercised in their territory had to do with another type of democracy and with the freedom to exercise it, nurture it, and expand it.

In mid-February 1999, five thousand Zapatistas took to the streets of San Cristóbal de Las Casas; on the 1st of January 2003, the Zapatista protesters had gone up to 20 000; on the 7th of May 2011, 15 000 Zapatistas marched against Calderón's war; and in December 2012, the Zapatista demonstrators in Chiapas had gone up to 40 000. It has been said that some cannot keep up with the autonomous pace and break off. There is also proof of this; however, the great presence of committed young people must not be overlooked. The celebration of their 25th anniversary was an impressive demonstration of defensive organization, with uniformed members of the Zapatista militia and thousands of Zapatistas marching. There have been massive encounters of women, analysts, artists, and scientists. Zapatismo is constantly searching and advancing. As people in Europe said before the arrival of the maritime delegation in 2021, Zapatismo has taught them to ask and to listen.

The Zapatistas have proven that their struggle is not for state power. They privilege dialogue and true consultation both within their communities and with civil society. They have combined peace with dignity. At the beginning they referred to democracy in the broad sense, but they soon turned to direct democracy. From the moment of their first

public appearance, they have highlighted the importance of resistance, they have struggled against neoliberalism, they have supported the globalization of rebelliousness and the critique against the different powers, the call to not give in and to partake in the construction of a new Mexico and of a different world from below. They have put their heart and soul in the pursuit of autonomy. They discussed it with those in power until 2001, when they realized that this dialogue was deceitful; then they turned to *de facto* autonomy, faced with a government that spoke about peace and continued to wage war. Zapatismo has realized that the answer to the government, the political class, the parties, official elections, the Congress, the Supreme Court, the great exploiters, and the paramilitaries must be “no.” From “no” to neoliberalism, they have gone on to the clarity of opposing capitalism and patriarchy. Their words and actions pursue a life in freedom and self-government through the form of ruling by obeying the people. They have deepened their autonomy by way of the autonomous municipalities and the Juntas de Buen Gobierno. Zapatismo understood that, in civil society, there was an above and a below, and dedicated its efforts to connecting with those below in society. It set out to rebuild Mexico from below, all the time creating ties with different rebellions around the globe. The Zapatistas aspire to a free and autonomous organization of those below. They inspire the globalization of resistance, fostering the encounters of rebels of all sorts. Through silence or speaking, through red alerts or detentes, in a clandestine or open way, all decisions are made freely and collectively. They force no one to do anything, they respect freedom, and they trigger libertarian processes.

The Zapatistas have defended their freedom to decide how they want to live with resolve, and they have done this through trial and error, constantly risking and innovating. They have defended their right to error and correction. They have privileged listening to others and what they call the exchange of experiences of those below. They do not cease to ask questions, and they have walked in search of the elaboration of an anticapitalist programme with those who can be found below and to the left. They have put to practice the freedom to intervene, speak, discuss, and reach decisions in common within their own organization, as well as in their contact with those from below and to the left. They have promoted another way of doing politics.

Zapatismo has undergone a process of transformation from wanting to change the grave social injustice by force of arms, during the first days, to attempting this change through dialogue. One must not forget the transitions it has experienced. At the beginning there was only a rigid military structure that ruled over its bases; this was corrected to respect the will of these bases, which have been fundamental for the movement. The practice of autonomy has meant that their attempts acquired a horizontal dynamic. Arguably, there is a military Zapatismo and a Zapatismo of unarmed civilians, the one that lives in the communities. Their experimentations initially overlapped. After one year of experimenting with the Caracoles, Zapatista self-criticism led to the conclusion that there should be no military interference with the autonomous authorities. Their experience in the autonomous municipalities is such that the autonomy not only applies to their relations with external powers but also, intensely, to life in the commu-

nities. Zapatismo has been creating alternatives; it has revitalized the hope of creating another world.

Having reviewed their process and the different stages they have undergone, it is fair to say that the Zapatistas never settle, they constantly undertake new pursuits. They experiment in the creation of social relations that are not oppressive but, rather, based on solidarity and cooperation. They are, of course, aware of the fact that this is not an idyllic path, but one filled with contradictions and obstacles. Zapatismo is constantly concerned with the liberation of women. They insist on the importance of organization, they change, they support innovative fronts or campaigns, they leave aside what does not work anymore, always keeping in mind the defence of life.

Zapatismo does not become institutionalized, but remains a creative movement, one that does not rest on something that is given but rather constantly questions itself and makes the necessary changes. By behaving differently and creating new social relations, it has challenged capitalism and the state in everyday life, for they are not things, but rather hubs of relations. For the Zapatistas, justice, democracy, rebelliousness, memory, respect, dignity, freedom, and life are not separate, they are an interwoven whole. Although the war against them continues, they do not prepare soldiers, but rather promoters of health and education, and they have laid the foundations for an autonomy that also encompasses many different aspects. They have abandoned revolutionary vanguardism in favour of the practice of ruling by obeying. They see that incongruence is the way of the powerful, and that is why they do not choose to walk down that path. The EZLN does

not govern the communities; the communities themselves organize collectively. Furthermore, Zapatismo is clearly playful, festive, it is a revolution that knows how to dance.

In the face of the domination of the capitalist state, Zapatismo has practiced resistance with a project of autonomy. It has greatly innovated with the proclamation and practice of ruling by obeying, which does not imply that the people rule over their government, but rather that the people rule themselves. For the Zapatistas, the goal is not to take state power, but to radically transform power relations from below. They aspire to create a great anti-systemic social movement that will destroy the oppressive power from the grassroots.

From the beginning, Zapatismo has shown a new type of internationalist disposition. It has set out to foster the confluence of those below on numerous occasions. Finally, it arrived at the conviction that it is by sharing pains, problems, and experiences that the communities, regions, nations, and the entire world can interconnect their struggles, fostering the realization that the source of the dispossessions and affronts can be found in the capitalist system; therefore, the latter must be confronted at all levels and, even more so, globally. The journey that has begun with the insubmissive in Europe in 2021 springs from their conviction to promote this global tapestry. In Mexico, they have shown solidarity with the struggles for truth and justice relating to a great number of grievances, including dispossession and the many victims of forced disappearance or murder. They have highlighted that, for Zapatismo, struggle is forever; it is a way of looking at life and at the world that is aligned with the culture of the

people of Maya origins who rule over themselves. It does not separate the means from the ends, for the struggle is not *for* something, it is a way of life. Zapatismo does not want to rule over others, but to encourage those below to organize and rule over themselves. Ethics is a central axis in this new way of doing politics (Llopis 2021). Zapatismo has been a source of inspiration for the construction of alternatives with no homogenization and with respect for different forms and modalities. It has not proposed vertical unity, but interweaving of the diverse, promoting the intertwining of multiple autonomous differences; in this, it converges with the Kurdish vision of building a global democratic confederalism. The Zapatista women have launched an intense and successful antipatriarcal struggle. Zapatismo has shown in a very original and dynamic way that the defence of life involves the unification of struggles against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy.



Women from the support bases during the 1st Festival of “Sharing Art for Humanity” (CompArte por la Humanidad) Caracol Oventik, Chiapas, 2016. Photo: Francisco De Parres Gómez.

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About the Collection

The *Al Faro Zapatista* Collection is a tribute to Zapatista women, children, elders, *otroas*, and men in their more than 500 years of resistance and almost 28 years of rebellious public life. The initiative seeks to join the Journey for Life. We do it from what we are: social science workers, active activists.

We do it because Zapatismo has been the beacon for many of us and other inhabitants of planet Earth, the lighthouse in the middle of The Storm caused by what, in 2017, the Zapatista women named the “machista and patriarchal capitalist system,” fueled by racism and “cis-heteronormativity,” as the sexual diversities in motion and re-existence call it.

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AL FARO ZAPATISTA COLLECTION

Zapatismo, born in Chiapas, has been a complex process with many stages and adjustments. From its public appearance, in the early hours of 1994 until 2021, it has been characterized by its originality and great capacity for continuous innovation. This movement has shaken the traditional certainties around democracy and has given birth to new ways of doing politics for the daily construction of a world where many worlds fit. Attempts have been made to circumscribe it to its regional circumstances. However, with actions and thoughts that have had substantial repercussions at a planetary level, it has broken all the fences that attempt to enclose it. This book makes a synthetic description of Zapatismo's future and a first reflection to highlight that the defence of life has been fundamental.

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