

# PABLO GONZÁLEZ CASANOVA

An exceptional personality



**Jorge Alonso**





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**Interinstitutional Chair 'Jorge Alonso', University of Guadalajara  
and CIESAS**

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Calle España 1359 / C.P. 44190 / e-mail: occte@ciesas.edu.mx

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## **Pablo González Casanova: an exceptional personality**

### **Start**

**T**alking about Don Pablo while he is so actively and lucidly celebrating his 100th birthday reminds me of the French existentialist and feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir and the rhetorician and fine stylist Marcus Tullius Cicero, and what they wrote about old age. At some point in the previous century, this rebellious Frenchwoman reflected on how when someone reached old age there was a decline in mental faculties and a change in their attitude towards the world; but she thought that a person shouldn't approach the end of his or her life empty-handed and alone. She advised us to continue pursuing goals that give life meaning, such as dedication to people, communities, causes, and committing to creating. Passions should be kept strong enough. She emphasized that life always maintained certain value, as long as it was shared with others; love, friendship, compassion, and also indignation, as the latter constitutes grounds to continue speaking out and taking action. Life must be committed and justified enough to continue to adhere to it (De Beauvoir, 1970). The also controversial Roman writer, who lived in the first century before our era, wrote a classic text in which he considered old age to be a time of fruitful creativity and learning. He saw old age as favorable to the realization of a synthesis of many experiences (Cicero).

It has been estimated that there are currently about half a million people in the world who are 100 years old or older. In Mexico, estimations suggest there are about 19 thousand centenarians. If we look at Don Pablo's case, years have somewhat conditioned a strength that was uncommon; but his attitude towards life has not changed at all, because his thoughts and feelings are still very much dynamic, in favor of a world with justice, freedom, and true democracy. His mind has not declined, as it maintains clarity, dynamism, and commitment to those who are less privileged.

Much has been written, and very well, about Don Pablo's school of thought, work, and action. It is difficult to talk about what he has been and what he continues to be, but we can try; even if I'm almost certain I am a long way from approaching him in a way that will do him justice. Victor Toledo reminded us of González Casanova's excellent counterargument to capitalist modernity (Toledo, 2021). We should rejoice in the presence of a personality like Don Pablo who, at the age of 100, continues to have relevant academic activity and has gained important recognitions. He is a very active writer, and his work is truly amazing. An internet search of his name produces 168 thousand results; and if the search is narrowed down to the academic field, it produces over 11 thousand results. Sociologist Raul Romero wrote that Pablo Gonzalez Casanova has taught many generations and has guided them towards the most advanced knowledge in critical and new science. Romero pointed out how Don Pablo has been a pioneer of interdisciplinary knowledge in Mexico. He promoted institutions and many national and international activities to maintain a critical dialogue between the humanities and science. He has adopted the struggle for



democracy, liberation, and socialism. He has been in solidarity with transformative social processes almost everywhere in the world. In Latin America he is held in high esteem for his liberating spirit, not beholden to any orthodoxy, and is admired for being highly committed. He accompanied the resistance against the coup d'état in Guatemala (1954), the Cuban revolution since 1959, the Popular Union with Salvador Allende in Chile, the true *Sandinismo* in Nicaragua, the revolution led by the Comandante Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, and especially, the Zapatista rebellion. He is recognized because he stands out as a great human being, with a young heart and up-to-date thought processes; for being an example of congruence, an independent and critical spirit. Because, regardless of personal attacks waged by the privileged population, he has resolutely positioned himself on the side of the poor (Romero, 2021).

I will take a brief look at his career, emphasizing his commitment to the university, his tireless search for new paradigms, and the synthesis of a few concepts that have been very important to him. I will refer to his main studies on various political issues, always driven by the ideal of democracy. I will also emphasize his vital commitment to the Zapatista struggle.

### **The university man**

Don Pablo has been a model advocate of the role of the university in society and, especially, of university autonomy to avoid its submission to a ruling power. He advocated for the movement of 1968. Two years later he was appointed rector of the UNAM, and he expanded enrollment so that more

low-income students could receive a university education. In his inaugural speech, González Casanova emphasized that he wanted to democratize education, as in the opening of higher education to a larger number of students, as well as greater participation by professors and students in university responsibilities and decision-making.

He announced the beginning of a cutting-edge project aimed at teaching as many students as possible and doing so at a high level. Of course, he faced obstacles, but he saw them as an opportunity to promote changes. He created a new university modality, the College of Sciences and Humanities, which was intended to renew the university's dynamism by reforming methods for acquiring knowledge. In 1972 he promoted the open university to expand high school and higher education, thus promoting effective cooperation with other Mexican and international educational institutions (Romero 2021b).

The government waged a terrible war against him with aggressive and protected "*porros*", which prompted the rector to request the entry of the police to the university premises. Don Pablo did not fall into the trap and chose to resign to avoid further harassment against the university, its autonomy, and the democratic and independent workers' organization. When, at the end of the 20th century, another rector allowed the Federal Police to enter the UNAM premises, Don Pablo resigned as director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Science and the Humanities, which he had founded and expanded, as an act of protest and in solidarity with the university movement. He explained that among other reasons for doing so, two important reasons stood out: a subjective one related to maintaining his long-

held position against the use of violence, and an objective one that corresponded to the historical and social experience of Latin America (Romero 2021c).

Don Pablo has stated that in order to change, increase, and improve the executive and representative organizations of the University as a whole, procedures contrary to the university's ethical principles should never be used. He has pointed out that the old system of personal authority should be ended and converted into a new system of institutional authority, in which the community would set the rules of conduct and convert them into rules of action that would eliminate the personal arbitrariness of any member of the university community. He has also stated that the university's central goal is knowledge of nature and humanity, respecting the principles of academic freedom, research, and expression.

He considers that a fundamental university goal is contributing to the transformation of the world and society, and making knowledge more and more solid. He has pointed out the need to reform the entire education system from elementary school to postgraduate studies, to form those who research the problems of the individual, society, and nature. He has argued that a true professor never stops studying, and a true student also learns to teach (Saladino, 2004). He published a text in which he outlined what universities in the 21st century should be like to free themselves from the neoliberal onslaught.

### **The researcher**

Don Pablo has studied a wide range of relevant topics. He has been part of research teams constituted to address the

most pressing problems at any given time. In the 1960s he became famous for his research on Mexican democracy. He pointed out that democracy was measured by people's participation in income, culture, and power, and anything else was democratic folklore or rhetoric. He denounced the fact that there were apparent democracies. He also detected the existence of a counterrevolutionary arithmetic.

In the 1970s he criticized how U.S empirical research addressed Latin American violence. He explored structural reforms in Latin America. He reflected critically about what had happened in Chile and published a paper on neo-fascism and the social sciences. He called to fight against fascism wherever it appeared. He presented theoretical and methodological experiences in the development of political chronologies for the study of Latin America. He not only explained the domination system in Latin America, but also explored possible ways to put an end to it. He researched class mediation and struggle. He spoke about a policy in which the people are the central actors. He studied the origins of socialist thought in Latin America. He considered that it was necessary to move from colonial underdevelopment to socialism. He addressed the political reform and its prospects in Mexico. He analyzed and criticized the Mexican One-party State, and expanded the approach of several social movements, Mexican electoral practices, and emerging democracy. He spoke out in favor of world disarmament.

In the 1980s he scrutinized the theories and practices of states and political parties. He presented theories on the State and its different materializations in Latin America. He also delved into the labor and peasant movements in the continent. Furthermore, he addressed the realities of U.S-

Central America relations. He scrutinized what the new revolution in Nicaragua involved. He set teams to rescue the history of the working class in Mexico. He explored the new world capitalist order as seen from the global South; he also delved into democracy and multiethnic states in the Latin American region. He dissected the Mexican elections, supported the *neocardenista* movement and opposed, with scientifically-founded elements, the fraud of 1988. He called for research into elections with alternatives, and to go deeper into what a non-privileged people's democracy involved. He placed Mexico in the crisis of the time. He emphasized the role of the workers in national economic policies. He proposed emancipation from colonial thinking. He opposed the oppressive unpayable debt imposed by predatory financial capitalism.

In the 1990s he expanded discussions on democracy, imperialism, and Latin American liberation. He also outlined what a people's party entailed. He raised the need to overcome the prevailing theories. He has criticized the fact that democracies have been exclusive, which is aggravated when they are seen as something formal and even reduced to elections. Democracy must overcome a practice that is enclosed in political society, from an epistemological perspective, since it must be a means to solve social deficiencies. He argued that it was urgent for democracy to embrace all aspects of social life, and decision-making beyond one sector of the population. He talked about democracy for everyone. He was interested in distinguishing the concepts of hegemony, autonomy, and self-management. He wrote profusely about defending Cuba. He proposed an intellectual corpus for Latin American liberation. He delved

into several revolutions, both of history and in progress. He researched liberation experiences and the Marxist analysis of the contemporary world. He studied the formation of progressive thought in Mexico. He presented the model of decumulation and underconsumption. He described what the working class was like at that time. He explored new ways of thinking about the world. He described and analyzed what was happening in Chiapas. He demonstrated that Mexico was at crossroads. He criticized global exploitation. He delved into the involvement of indigenous communities in the construction of the world. He explored organization and chaos. He has promoted the search for alternatives, as well the firm conviction that a better world is not only possible but feasible.

At the beginning of the 21st century, he continued defending the rights of indigenous peoples. He also wrote about complexity and contradictions. In the second decade of the 21st century, he explored the relationship between ecocide, knowledge, and corporations. He explored, from the complexity of science, the damage caused by neoliberal globalization. He spoke on the organization of life and work in the world. He demonstrated how, in the dark history of U.S. imperialism, the empire had never lied as much based on unawareness of lost power, a fact which it ignored. His latest research includes studies on the problems of war and peace. He called attention to war in the military sector and the economic sphere, as well as in culture, where virtuality and reality coexist and are causing the destruction of the Earth. He recommended looking at this war at both its formal and informal levels to defend life. He made an urgent call to organize a large network of collectives in defense of

the land, to fight for the Earth and the planet, and to take the side of the poor. He called to form a front for life, as he detected the presence a wide array of popular struggles that are disconnected. He clarified that, in the immediate future, the people would focus on a peaceful resolution but would not compromise their principles. He has glimpsed the history ahead as one marked by both conflict and consensus. He wondered whether we were facing a terminal crisis of capitalism or of humanity. He stressed that autonomy was a proven path to liberation.

When he was appointed coordinator of the University Seminar on the Current State of the Sciences and Humanities at UNAM, the former rector praised the Zapatistas for calling to imagine a new society based on studying the state of the society we live in. The organization of truth, and the commitment with the “underprivileged and to the left” would become a force, along with what was learned from the struggle itself and other struggles, accompanying, dialoguing, and learning with their members. He emphasized that no message was more urgent or necessary than the preservation of life on Earth, which was under attack by capitalism. In this necessary struggle he pointed out the Zapatista creative contribution to autonomy. When speaking of the freedom to which the Zapatistas had referred to in the first course of their *escuelita*, he wrote that freedom implied fearlessness, knowing the truth about the world we are in, and confronting the powerful and aggressive problems that threaten us. He praised the fact that the Zapatistas had lost their fear in all senses, above all their fear to know, and that freedom was enriched by the battle of those who did not sell out or surrender, for which the Zapatistas served as a great

example. He insisted that it was necessary to propose the organization of life around values such as freedom in the face of a war that was made up of many wars. He considered that rather than exhausting our attention with criticisms of the lords of power and money, we should ask ourselves about possible ways out, and how we could build and create that freedom.

At the beginning of the third decade, he called attention to the fact that the pandemic had exacerbated existing inequalities. He insisted on the need of joining natural sciences and human science to assure humanity a pleasant life. It was necessary to fight for freedom and life. He stressed the importance of thinking the collective do-think problems, which was radical. He indicated that a new epistemology of collectivities could not distance itself from transformative praxis, which opened the way to popular initiative, community action, and the people's empowerment through their own creative knowledge. He invited to research and understand the knowledge of rebel crowds, the working class, the thinking-acting of workers, and of peoples; he emphasized the creative transformation of the anticolonial movements, and highlighted the liberating capacity of the collectivities that were the engine of freedom. He recommended inquiring into what collectivities should and could know from their own praxis.

He considered that the changes in course seemed to indicate the end of a mode of production and the beginning of another, which was largely unexpected. He praised the return of the joy of thinking and doing what is revolutionary. He pointed out that all this did not come from the academic world, nor from the leaders, but from the thinking and acting



of the widest array of movements and collectives. The creation in history of collectivities that thought and acted, and whose collective action was more successful for human liberation or emancipation, had gained immense value (González Casanova, 2021).

### **Concept builder**

Don Pablo has had the ability to deepen existing concepts and give them a new dynamism, rather than just coining them. One of his defining characteristics is to know how to combine events and ideas in a very original and creative way. He has questioned and overcome the traditional paradigms of social sciences and has opened new ways of doing science. He has made breakthroughs and paradigm shifts. Even Einstein, he recalled, was dominated by the idea that there was only one universe and one creation. This had not been questioned, but new studies in the sciences of matter and the life sciences pointed towards different perspectives of different creations and universes. Following the drama of social paradigms, he claimed that a common pattern of analysis emerged in the three great areas of scientific thought (in the sciences of matter, the sciences of life and in the human sciences) suggesting that creation did not occur only once, but that it has been an ongoing phenomenon, and that the whole universe is not just one, but many. He has drawn attention to physical, chemical, biological, mathematical, logical, and psychological changes. Referring to many authors, he shows that we are not predetermined. He has delved into technology and its limits. Taking into account the techno-sciences and current humanism, he has made new reflections on the relations of

domination, exploitation and mediation. In January 1986 he founded the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Social Sciences, and in 1995 he expanded it to become the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Sciences and Humanities. In this center he organized seminars, research projects and publications of a new type that studied technologies for democracy, alternative political and economic democracy, political rights as human rights, democracy and the media, an agenda for the end of the century, the different perspectives of the transition to democracy, social movements, collective identities, and linguistic policies. A discussion on the basic concepts in all sciences and humanities was also organized as part of the program. After leaving this organization, Don Pablo continued to be very active in his task of promoting research on the most pressing issues. In 2005 he launched a project on the "Fundamental Concepts of Our Time" for the purpose of analyzing the recent redefinitions of the most significant concepts and phenomena in today's world. This project has kept him alive and he has contributed to his enrichment and development. In the encyclopedia of concepts that he has directed, he chose to write about four of them: community, internal colonialism, co-optation, and capitalism. I will now present my reading of these writings.

#### a) Community

At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, he deepened the concept of community, highlighting spatial dialectics.

He specified that the purpose of clarifying its different uses and prioritizing some definitions over others was to

understand the phenomena of oppression and liberation coexisting at specific moments in time. He underlined that the term community was very useful to understand the social, cultural, political, and economic space of struggles; the spatial pluralism of philosophies and narratives; the intercommunicative actions or the geographical variation of relations of exploitation, depredation, enslavement, and colonization. He insisted that the concept of community occurred at all levels of abstraction and concreteness. Thus, it included the interaction, combination, inclusion of the Other as an expression of affinities and antagonism.

He stated that social classes were inserted within communities. He gave us a new hint when he said that several problems in the history of capitalism could be rectified by means of the idea of community. He warned us about the prejudices that could creep in from Eurocentrism. He also noted that the West tended to monopolize even critical thinking, and that the concept of community made it possible to determine the limits of generalizations. He said that redefining the concept of community from a local to a global level implied recognizing the right to theorize, criticize and construct the world from different perspectives and spatial positions. He argued that larger units such as society, the object of study of the social sciences, had been born from an individualistic perspective, that functionalist sociology had been a Master of Quantitative concealment. In contrast, the category of communities prevented reduction to mere sums or stratifications of individuals or citizens. There were neighborly units, formal and informal associations, and these were not "imagined communities" whose members did not know each other, or converse with each other.

Those who exercised power also knew each other. Along with social and class relations, he emphasized that the relationships between communities were fundamental in the study of the classes themselves, as well as in the study of domination and exploitation, mediations and repressions. To the democracy of citizens was added that of peoples. The category of community (macro and micro) made it possible to compare regions with their differences in communities and classes.

He made progress by showing that only the category of community, in its double sense of synergistic and dialectical interaction, allowed us to understand the unity of communities in their emancipation and liberation struggle. It would be necessary to see not only the domination and exploitation of classes, but that of communities as well. The commonality corresponded to a generalization of synergistic and contradictory characteristics, relations, and subjects. There was a lack of understanding of the concrete dialectic of class and community. Indigenous communities ought to define the meaning of struggle. Zapatismo rethought democracy from the grassroots, involving communities and marginalized neighborhoods, and outlined a profound democracy in society and government. The idea was not to take over the State and then build, or to participate in the electoral process, which would lead them to forget to build autonomous and plural power in the communities themselves. Don Pablo pointed out that the new movement of radical democracy was immense.

It corresponded to a new form of persuasion which had to do with the pedagogy of learning. It was not propaganda of something already known. The communities focused on

the new thing they were building and fighting for. Attention was drawn to the emergence of the community of “victims” which proposed utopian alternatives for transformation, as well as future systems in which they wanted to live in order to stop being the community of victims. This community fought for survival, respect and knowledge of otherness, and dignity, thus entering into a dynamic for liberation.

Domination and exploitation, along with liberation and democracy, had to do with communities and assemblies of neighbors or neighborhoods, community connections that combined face-to-face and distance communication. The term community reappeared in the information society. There was a change in the scale of the concept of community. He recalled that the struggle of the communities of the poor was very old. In Latin America it was based on the defense of the land and territories of which the Indian peoples were dispossessed. Many struggles were articulated in regional, national, and even global networks. He warned that welfare, paternalistic and clientelist policies were in crisis. There was a disbelief in indigenism, developmentalism, or in the false solidarity of caciques and politicians. The communities thought of securing and improving their future through their own organization and internal and external articulation, with an obstinate respect for themselves. Everything was related to the strengthening of their forms of resistance and the construction of their autonomy. The alternative of the community was no longer society. The concept of community was one of the alternatives to neoliberal individualism. It was part of the construction of an alternative that would rethink the problems of liberation, democracy, and socialism (González Casanova, 2000).

## b) Internal colonialism

Since the 1960s, González Casanova had questioned anthropologists about the fact that the problem of indigenous peoples was essentially a problem of internal colonialism. Indigenous communities were internal colonies in Mexico. The indigenous community had the characteristics of the colonized society. In his reformulation of this category at the beginning of the 21st century, he emphasized that the concept of internal colonialism was very significant for the new struggles of the peoples. He specified that it occurred in the economic, political, social, and cultural fields; that it was necessary to follow how it evolved throughout the history of the nation-state and capitalism; and how it was related to emerging, systemic, and anti-systemic alternatives, in particular with resistance and the construction of autonomies. However, several ideological currents had considered this a taboo category, which was linked to the phenomena of conquest. He called attention to the fact that peoples or nations colonized by the nation-state suffered conditions similar to colonialism and neocolonialism at the international level. He warned that in classical Marxist thought the analysis of the domination and exploitation of workers by the bourgeoisie prevailed over the analysis of the domination and exploitation of some countries by others.

He noted that the neglect of the concept of internal colonialism in both official and critical Marxism was motivated by a variety of causes. The fight of nations against imperialism and the class conflict within each nation overshadowed the ethnic struggles within nation-states. The logic of the construction of the State and of political alliances ensured

that this category was rejected. It was Wright Mills who was the first to refer to internal colonialism, he recalled.

Rodolfo Stavenhagen had also used this term. He mentioned that in the 1960s he had insisted that in the countryside (outside Mexico City) there were still colonial-type relations prevailing.

He then broadened the scope of this concept and linked it to regional differences in the exploitation of workers and to the transfers of surplus from various regions towards the dominant ones. The history of this category and the discussions resulting from it showed difficulties in the understanding of class conflict and the combined international and internal fight for liberation, he pointed out. He also insisted that from the origins of capitalism the forms of colonial exploitation combined slave labor, servile labor, and wage labor. Colonial and imperialist states and their ruling classes reestablished and preserved colonial relations with minorities and colonized ethnic groups within their political borders. He examined the objection that had been made to the category when it was asserted that in any case there was internal semi-colonialism or neocolonialism, which was partly true if by such were taken the forms of colonial dependence and exploitation through the use of native rulers who allegedly represented the ethnic groups of a nation-state. He was aware that not all the rulers of the oppressed ethnic groups allowed themselves to be co-opted by the ruling forces, since many headed the resistance of their peoples. Therefore, it should be taken into account that the indigenous communities were not only objects of domination and exploitation, but also important subjects of resistance and liberation. This category had given rise to mystifications such as being detached from social classes or

excluded from exploitation. It was detached from the battle for power; and it led to the ethnicism that supported the colonialist policies of the great powers. There was a conservative version that ignored or denied class conflict and isolated each ethnic group. A different approach was that of rejecting the category in the name of a necessary de-peasantization. It was also rejected with arguments from the social sciences, claiming that it was a cultural problem of traditional society that could be solved with integrative modernization. It was even said that internal colonialism would cease to exist with progress and development.

Don Pablo turned to Mariátegui, who placed the indigenous peoples at the center of national politics. It was made clear that the originality of his approach was best perceived if the problem of ethnic groups was placed among the central problems of humanity. Don Pablo agreed with those who argued that the exploitation of some regions by others could only be understood when the relations of production and communication with their hierarchies and beneficiaries were studied in the regions. In doing so, internal colonialism was visualized both in the intensification of the domination of national and international capital and in the occupation of territorial and social spaces from one country to another or within the same country. Don Pablo said that the exploitation, domination, discrimination and exclusion of “colonial workers” by national and foreign capital took place within national political borders, or outside them. He recommended looking at how globalizing and neoliberal politics redefined companies and countries with their international and transnational networks. In terms of relations of domination and exploitation, he referred to the



networks that articulated the different types of unfair trade and colonialism, as well as the different types of exploitation of workers and the different policies of participation and exclusion, distribution sectors, jobs and regions. He noted that the categories of accumulation had been historically redefined. Alternative movements could not ignore the great changes that had occurred in the social categories of the system of accumulation and capitalist domination.

It was necessary to be careful at this point because the recognition of these changes gave place to formulations that considered imperialism, nation-state, and class conflict as dead categories together with covert operations in the social sciences and their supposedly correct language that claimed to represent a “modern” left. He insisted that, in the midst of the great changes that had occurred, internal colonialism was a complex category that was being restructured in its relations with others and that demanded to be considered in any critical analysis of the world. It was necessary to include internal colonialism articulated with international and transnational colonialism. These new struggles fought by the rebellious or resisting peoples contributed to shed light on the complexity that the categories of capitalism had reached. There was a need to record the painful experiences of mediation, co-optation and corruption that the various revolutions suffered with the integration of revolutionary movements into the political systems of the State. The new emerging forces were leading to a rethinking of democracy, liberation and socialism, adding new emphasis to the ethical-political values of communities and autonomous resistance organizations in the face of a type of capitalism that had colonized all aspects of everyday life. He pointed

out that the presence of a new international, internal, and transnational colonialism had found an important confirmation, since to the international war was added the internal war considered as the main form of the world war. This war was originally associated with counterinsurgency warfare and was included in the theory of the war of varied intensity that was being waged throughout the world. He emphasized that the struggle for the autonomy of peoples, nationalities or ethnic groups had not only united the victims of internal, international, and transnational colonialism, but had come up against the interests of the same dominant, predatory, and exploitative class, which operated with its business, military, paramilitary complexes, and articulations and organized civilian organizations as its clients (González Casanova, 2003). It has been pointed out that Pablo González Casanova and Rodolfo Stavenhagen proposed the category of internal colonialism to refer to the set of social relations of domination and exploitation between distinct cultural groups, each with its own class structures, within the same nation-state. This concept contributed to the renewal of critical thinking. Currently, a project of global, international and intranational recolonization is being promoted. Therefore, the fight for emancipation at the local, national, regional, and global levels is relevant (Romero, 2021b).

#### c) Cooptation

Don Pablo claimed that cooptation was holding back the election from below. Quoting Mariátegui, he said that cooptation broke the morale of the producers or social morale. He saw cooptation and assimilation as two ways in which it

violated the cohesion and homogeneity that was necessary for peoples and workers to achieve their goals. Anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movements should not be separated. Colonizing politics entailed segregation and assimilation, violating personal and cultural identity against the autonomy of individuals and collectivities with a sense of disrespect and as bribery accompanied by authoritarian, paternalistic and repressive positions. Assimilation facilitated co-optation, and the latter promoted the former, since the colonized pretended to have the face of the colonizer, reaffirmed the contempt for his race, and adopted the values and interests of the colonizer. Assimilation also corresponded to a policy of co-optation and collaborationism. Imperialism and global capitalism promoted policies of co-optation and assimilation of opposing groups and forces. The policy of the co-opted and assimilated was part of a web of imperialism. Assimilation and co-optation occurred in all social spaces of the world; and they were taking place before neoliberalism. Don Pablo criticized the fact that the co-opted and assimilated left, that spoke about democracy, human rights, and fought against corruption, discussed it without ever referring to imperialism and capitalism. He insisted that co-optation, assimilation, and collusion were part of the establishment of the new yoke of imperialism.

Mimetic, empathetic, and assimilated intellectuals contributed to immense ideological confusion by adopting the mutilated approaches of critical thinking. They opened themselves up to the neoliberal rationale that legitimized capitalism and market democracy; freedom of speech that was purified from its previous, and current, insertion in a system of exploitation; and detached from the monopolies that

dominated parties, elections, media, universities; rewards and punishments and even the margins of autonomy and freedom at small scales. Nevertheless, in the midst of the great lie that is neoliberalism, other critical perspectives were being delineated that would take shape in new rebel movements. If the role of the assimilated intellectuals was immense in the imposition of the great neoliberal lie, no lesser number of intellectuals continued or joined the struggles of the wretched of the earth against neoliberalism, capitalism, and imperialism. He called attention to the fact that throughout the global social movement, the struggle against cooptation and assimilation had created powerful antibodies, which included the defense of identity against assimilation, cooptation and corruption. He spoke to the fact that unity in diversity required respect for one's own dignity and the dignity of others. In the practice of the fights that united the diverse, the identity of the "we" was confirmed by the coherence between what was said and what was done. And the form of consistent expression was deepened in the struggle of the poor. With them arose the struggles against oppression and for emancipation, against exploitation and for cooperation, against the democratic farce and for democratic practices, against imperialism and for the liberation and the autonomy of nations, peoples, and individuals against capitalism and for a socialism that included the fights for freedom, democracy, justice and the construction of a project. There was a need to combine the forums and networks of dialogue for an alternative world which implied a new global organization from below, fighting for another necessary and possible world. (González Casanova, 2007).

#### d) Capitalism

In many texts, Don Pablo addressed issues related to capitalism. But in the analysis of the concepts, he also made an emphasis on the element of corruption. He argued that in order to understand capitalism it was necessary to delve into the fact of corruption, since it played a role as important as repression, negotiation, alienation and cooptation. The dominant forces had self-appointed themselves as the ones who defined what was and was not corruption. They promoted a complicated network of experts specialized in corruption. Don Pablo called attention to the fact that these official definitions did not mention the substantial plundering on humanity's wealth through privatization and denationalization that characterized the globalizing neoliberal model. He called attention to the links between corruption and the current processes of domination and capitalist accumulation, between organized crime and organized capitalism. He complained that in critical and revolutionary thinking, corruption and cooptation were among the most unnoticed systemic relations. The hegemonic social sciences isolated corruption and separated it from the process of capitalist accumulation, domination, and its mediating relations. It should not be overlooked that the interventions of imperialism corresponded to the subjugation and plundering of entire countries. Nowadays, original accumulation is an essential characteristic of globalizing neoliberalism, with multiple forms of corruption that were legitimized by the dominant system and its publicists. With intensified repression, the neoliberal states did not withdraw the policies of repression and negotiation;

but by reducing social concessions It increased the individual corruption of representatives, criminal organizations, labor organizations, and masked it with a smokescreen by issuing policies of charity towards the poor. In the midst of all this, threatening situations were created against those who did not submit and integrate into the system. At all levels, from the micro to the macro, corruption and cooptation served as macroeconomic cement for the structuring, disestablishment and restructuring of the negotiated, repressed, and annulled class struggle in systemic forms. Corruption and cooptation became a new globally organized policy. Capitalism had organized itself as global imperialism, not only through negotiation with the great powers and monopolies but through the assimilation and cooptation of elites, as well as corruption and collusion with them. This is how internal and international power was structured from the top-down. The apparatus of domination and accumulation of global capitalism was impressive. It had created efficient macro-looting policies.

Don Pablo called for the revelation of the concealed relations implicit in neoliberal policies. The globalizing and instrumental rationale of capitalism would be impracticable without the macroeconomic recourse of corruption, which in turn could not be possible without the macro-political recourse of the mafias that collaborate with the police, military, paramilitary entities, rulers, bankers, elites, and oligarchies. The legitimization of millionaire crimes gave a legal character to what was criminal. Corruption, legalized and concealed, by all means took place in the government, in politics, in the electoral contests of market democracy. Businessmen, politicians, and rulers further corrupted the

whole of the State and society. The legal corruption of market democracy, as the corruption of democratic governments, was a fundamental instrument for the decision-making process of war liberalism. The policy to put an end to the corruption of public officials consisted of turning the State, and the networks of power that linked it, into constitutional instruments in charge of reducing costs and increasing profits and providing wealth for the business-military complexes that dominated. An attempt was made to transform the authors of original accumulation into those responsible for the expanded and permanent accumulation in charge of the military-business complexes with their various symbioses of the former ruling classes and the mafias. Emancipation from the current system expanded on the idea of emancipation from the mediations and repressions of the capitalist system. Liberating mediations were required to confront organized capitalism and organized crime, inequitable accumulation, and the dictatorship of plutocracy. In the construction of emancipatory alternatives, containing, besieging, and crushing corruption and cooptation was a central problem because of the secondary effects that they had on the deterioration of critical and radical thinking and in the formation of new authoritarianisms. For Don Pablo, the case of Cuba continued to be a bastion of socialism that U.S. imperialism had not been able to defeat despite aggressive methods of siege and blockade. Morale, as a necessary instrument to build socialism, took on a central role. The Zapatistas in Mexico, the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil, the Indian peoples of the Andes confirmed the necessary character of the fight for morality and politics against corruption to end the systems of exploitation and

to build anti-capitalist alternatives and roads to socialism, democracy and liberation; as the Zapatistas say, "each in their own way" (González Casanova, 2007b).

He ventured into the analysis of exploitation, where he combined his knowledge of Marxism with approaches to formulas that opened new paths. He called attention to the fact that the history of the production of social relations (economic-power-cultural-political) was accentuated by neo-capitalism and neo-colonialism: monopoly capital and transnational corporations were born and developed; imperialism, the international and internal core-peripheries; and political, ideological, and economic mediations and negotiations, which combined with violence to produce stratified, localized, and unequal relations that are relatively functional for the dominant classes.

In his participation in the Zapatista seminar entitled *Critical Thought Against the Capitalist Hydra*, he spoke of a radical liberalism in the context of the struggle for freedom in the new and entangled class struggle against capitalism. He referred to the valuable contributions of the Zapatistas. He pointed out that Latin America was a region at the forefront of new proposals for emancipation. He stressed that each emancipatory movement would act in its own way, discarding premade recipes, but taking advantage of concepts derived from the most varied experiences. He said that he wanted to redefine the world by materializing words like freedom, justice, and democracy, which many times lost the attention, memory, and practice entailed by its meaning. He insisted on the urgent and necessary message of life preservation on Earth, the emancipation of human beings and the local, regional, and global organization of communities and



collectives of young people, peoples, workers, peasants, professionals who would honor their word, articulate their will and materialize their experience to effectively defend freedom and life. He emphasized that he would refer to definitions that had to do with the struggle at that time. He began with the word democracy, by which he understood that the big decisions would be made by the people, that the people would say what to do, what measures should be taken and what risks should be assumed. The oldest techniques of direct democracy would have to be combined with the new techniques of communication, information, and organization. With this combination, the problems to be solved could be faced, favoring the organizations that would allow the most efficient attainment of the emancipatory projects. He went on to deal with justice and said that it was both personal and social. Both built from the bottom by those at the bottom. You had to teach by example and behavior. Justice for everyone implied not remaining forever in the defense of our own rights and interests. This justice seriously reframed human rights. He spoke against individualism and consumerism. He came to see that the organization of life should be raised around the values of freedom, justice and democracy materialized.

In the current capitalist war, the weapons of corruption, repression and sometimes negotiation shine. He spoke of the unconventional world war, which was really a war made of many wars. There was a game involved in the design of that war of cruelties and confusion. We had to ask ourselves, what were the possible ways out of that hell and towards building freedom, justice and democracy? That war was not limited to the military but was immersed in the economic, political, ideological, informatic, social, and cultural dimensions. It

combined the spectacular world and the real world, there was a distraction war and a war waged in the physical world. But the unipolar world was unable to see the fight it could not win. All of this would be followed by the destruction of land, water, and atmosphere. The maximization of profits that was at the core of capitalism would destroy all that there was of life on the planet. He emphasized that there were clear signs of the crisis of capitalism, as well as of the crisis of human life. The wars were going to take place between repression, corruption, and negotiations. He also referred to two theories at war: the one corresponding to critical theory and classical Marxism that highlighted class struggle, which entailed the struggle for freedom, justice, democracy, autonomy and life. In front of it was the neoliberal and neoconservative global struggle, whose main attractor was the capitalist maximization of profits, power, and wealth, and which used multiple resources to achieve its goals, including using individualism against us, excluding those who suffered exploitation and oppression as informal workers, as peoples and countries dispossessed of their farmland, of their energy sources, of their food production, of the water from their springs, their rivers and lakes. Such was the capitalist war that had taken place and was going to take place between repressions, between corruptions and between negotiations. And in these three forms of war, it would be necessary to maintain and strengthen personal and collective morality, the morality of struggle and the morality of cooperation and sharing, the morality of service, the morality of respect for people and differences (González Casanova, 2015). In 2017 he wrote about Marx's masterpiece, *Das Capital*, as a classic piece of critical science.

## The Zapatista

Narrating what Don Pablo has said and done in the Zapatista world would require an enormous book. Only a few references will be made here. When Zapatismo first appeared in 1994, Don Pablo put his intelligence and life into supporting this new movement. He has written a lot about its future, but, above all, he has been an important protagonist of Zapatismo. On February 22nd of that year, the so-called Cathedral Dialogue began. Don Pablo said that it was the rarest thing in the history of mankind for two armies that were about to start a war to sign a non-aggression pact and say they were going to talk. The dialogues began in the Cathedral of San Cristóbal de las Casas and then continued in the *ejido* of San Miguel, which would culminate in the well-known dialogues of San Andrés. Don Pablo was a fundamental figure in the Intermediation Commission (CONAI, in its initials in Spanish) headed by Bishop Samuel Ruiz and made up of well-known figures in Chiapas and nation-wide. CONAI had the help of the Services and Advisory for Peace team (López and Rivas, 2016) in which Miguel Álvarez worked tirelessly. I asked Miguel Álvarez to share his testimony of Don Pablo's participation in CONAI. This was what he sent me: "I was a connecting link between two dear friends who were the driving force behind CONAI and accompanying the struggles and rights of indigenous peoples, but also various initiatives and defenses. I have known Don Pablo since the 1970s when we both participated in spaces organized by Don Sergio Méndez Arceo, and I got closer to him at UNAM (the National Autonomus University of Mexico), when he coordinated a national seminar with participants from all states and

agendas. I also knew Don Samuel since the seventies and more closely since 1991 when I was his secretary. Before the Zapatista uprising on January 1st, 1994, the mediator mandate of January 8th emerged; upon accepting it, Don Samuel assumed that understanding that it was not only an ecclesial task but a civil one, and with a political and transformative sense, hence from the beginning Don Samuel already knew that Don Pablo was indispensable, which is why he invited him to accompany Don Samuel on January 12 to Ocosingo, along with the government commissioner for dialogue, to demand a ceasefire. The strength of the great mobilization that was heading that Wednesday afternoon towards the Zócalo achieved the government declaration of a ceasefire at noon. Since then, Don Pablo and Don Samuel were already a dumbbell of a historical epicenter. Many things happened: the Cathedral Dialogues without agreements; the assassination of Colosio; the new and critical context; the change of commissioner. On October 13, 1994, Mr. Samuel was able to propose to the parties the expansion of CONAI with members of the civil society of Chiapas and Mexico. Officially, Don Pablo was included. However, before and after the presidential inauguration, Zedillo tried to avoid Don Samuel and CONAI, putting other channels into play. This prompted various measures and processes. Among these, it stands out that the EZLN declared in the first minutes of December 19, 31 autonomous municipalities, beyond the one recognized militarily as a "conflict zone." That day the national financial crisis happened. Don Samuel began his Fast for Peace; and the germ of the Bicameral Commission for Harmony and Pacification (COCOPA, in its initials in Spanish) appeared, demanding recognition from CONAI, which he

achieved until December 24. From there follows a long history of efforts, pursuits, and crises, in which the friendship, trust and solidity between Don Samuel and Don Pablo make them a complementary, emblematic, prophetic, and strategic beacon, yet respectful and discreet. Many have been the fruits and services of Don Pablo. His accomplishments with Don Samuel are especially appreciable, recognizable, irreplaceable. I insist that Don Pablo and Don Samuel were a bridge and translation between the prophetic and the strategic. The CONAI was the door, space and task that moved Don Pablo and brought him closer to the indigenous peoples and to Zapatismo" (Álvarez, 2021).

In August 1994, the National Democratic Convention convened by the Zapatistas began its work, and Don Pablo played an important role in it. At the end of the event, he suggested that the points made there should be supported by the political parties and not the other way around. He recognized Subcomandante Marcos for having renounced "*caciquismo*", vanguardism, and autocratic leadership, a unique fact in Mexican history. He stressed that it was a call for unity with pluralism, unity of people and ethnic groups of the world to create a project of universal democracy with social justice. At the end of the following year, he published a document in which he made a careful analysis of the causes of the rebellion. At the end of the 20th century, after a detailed criticism of so-called real socialism in Eastern Europe, he drew attention to the Zapatistas and how they became one of the most powerful reflection centers of the world, and a key point of it was respect for the indigenous community. He reminded that comandante Tacho said that when the different native peoples that made up Zapatismo

were together, they were a community; and when they were distant, they were a network. Don Pablo emphasized that the small, face-to-face community was combined with networks, and even with a network made up of many networks with common objectives and instantaneous participation. He explained that true democracy respects the autonomy of communities (González Casanova, 2000). Don Pablo was pleased with his commitment to contribute to the solution of the armed uprising in Chiapas in 1994, actively collaborating with Bishop Samuel Ruiz. He described the Zapatista philosophy as one of the highest expressions of the human being, because in it, Mayan, Spanish, universal, modern, and post-modern culture converged (González Casanova, 2001).

After the betrayal of the State as a whole in the San Andres Agreements, the Zapatistas had opted to reinforce their de facto autonomy. Don Pablo analyzed and praised the Zapatistas work in the so-called Caracoles, which grouped together several autonomous municipalities, where the idea of commanding by obeying the people was becoming a reality. He reflected on the alternatives proposed by the new movements aimed at the revolutionary tradition or the statist or reformist tradition, as well as the anarchist tradition. They were not fighting to reform the State, or to take State power, or to create isolated regions run by their communities. The Zapatistas' approach was combining the ancient forms of resistance of the communities with their articulation as a very plural network, which not only included different indigenous peoples, but also many minorities and regions. Zapatismo has not retreat into itself, but it took into account the peasants, workers, students, marginalized urban populations, new movements (such as those related

to gender, environmentalism, retired populations, the impoverished, unemployed, displaced, and movements at risk of extinction). The creation of networks and autonomous organizations posed a new alternative of struggle with growing capacities to confront the dominant system. Zapatistas had created rebel autonomous municipalities that not only articulated with each other, but also with outside communities and the world. Don Pablo posed not to isolate the category of internal colonialism from others, such as the struggle for autonomy and the dignity of people (González Casanova, 2003).

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, Don Pablo participated in the Peace with Democracy Group, made up of Bishops Samuel Ruiz and Raúl Vera; intellectuals like him; journalists; poets; and human rights advocates. This group issued a strong statement in defense of Zapatista autonomy and denounced a new and very dangerous and violent escalation in Chiapas against the Zapatista people. Miguel Álvarez pointed out that the Peace with Democracy Group, at the request of don Pablo and don Samuel, was a follow-up and accompaniment proposal, and a proposal to the process with former members of CONAI, COCOPA, the Follow-up and Verification Commission (COSEVER) and advisors. This group served as supervisor of the strategic process.

In the first half of the 2010s, Don Pablo said about Zapatismo: "they are us". He declared that the EZLN was the origin of the social unrest that was erupting all over the world. He highlighted the creative way of autonomy, freedom, justice, and democracy undertaken by the EZLN and the descendants of the Mayan people. He pointed out his

dynamic of learning from discourse that combined narratives, reflections, reason, and imagination with the fusion of acts and words. He praised the Zapatistas' ability to resist sieges and attacks. Regarding freedom, he gave importance to morals and politics. He recalled what a member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno (Good Government Assembly) had stated: the ability to know requires fearlessness. He reflected that on the fact that he had never heard this theory of knowledge expressed so clearly. He spoke about morality and integrity. If freedom existed in the origins of thinking, saying, and doing, it was enriched by the struggle of those who neither sold out nor surrendered (González Casanova, 2015).

On several occasions the Zapatista movement was accused of contributing to the division of the left. Don Pablo clarified that the Zapatista proposal, far from dividing the left, in reality sought to unify it, since the real left was the one that fought for independence and human dignity, a goal that did not exist in the institutional left. He pointed out that there could be no emancipation if there was exploitation, but ending exploitation was not enough, because emancipation was something else, and it involved the struggle for dignity. He condemned capitalism not just for ravishing resources, but the people's lands themselves. Furthermore, it creates enclaves that destroy Mother Earth. He called to fight for ethics, cooperation and sharing. He thought that union in diversity was a requirement. He recognized that Zapatistas had created a universal democracy, since democracy is power distributed in all people. He stressed that the responsibility of the anti-capitalist project was immense. He pointed out that the Zapatistas were inviting us to meditate, since they were not seeking to occupy positions, but rather a space of emancipatory ideological struggle.



He came to the conclusion that there was no other goal than bringing capitalism down. After explaining that the capitalists were so stupid and foolish that they could not understand how they had created the origin of their own death, Don Pablo affirmed that the necessary techniques to make this world a reality consisted of creating a world where many worlds could fit; and he added that this required increasing the capacity to communicate these projects to the rest of the world. He affirmed that in the land of the Zapatistas was the root of a project that gave humanity hope.

Don Pablo has also pointed out that Zapatistas maintain the idea of communities, and systems of communities that decide, which have the organized power to decide what corresponds to a new mode of struggling expression with different actors and their history. He insisted that we should not abandon, not even in the most difficult conditions, the study and analysis of reality; that practice and theory are not separated; that there is not just one walker, nor just one road, but many, although the destination, as the Zapatistas have insisted, remains the same: freedom. During his career, Don Pablo has received important national and international awards, however, his most appreciated recognition is the one given to him by the Zapatistas in 2018, who applauded Don Pablo for saying what he thought and not what Zapatistas imposed on him, that he was quite critical. They considered him a dear friend, they were proud of the company of his steps, words and specially his unwavering and unbending commitment to people. When he was incorporated as the first non-indigenous member of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, he was given the name of Comandante Contreras. In this event there was something very exciting:

for ten minutes a deafening applause was sustained with intensity as Don Pablo personally greeted the EZLN fellow comandantes (Alonso, 2020). Miguel Alvarez commented that Don Pablo, as Comandante Contreras, has crowned and integrated all his struggles, visions, and dimensions. This has been his highest priority. In a virtual conference in October 2021 with UNAM students, Don Pablo said he was in awe of the Zapatista journey through life in Europe, which offered hope for better times ahead.

### **Not a closure, but a continuation**

Pablo González Casanova's centennial trajectory has been wide, deep, dazzling, inciting to action on the side of those who fight against capitalism and defending life in a world threatened by huge dangers. He has been a teacher and a researcher that breaks molds, opens perspectives, and cultivates hopes. He is one of the world's sharpest intellectuals, a man who has lived in two centuries with an enviable ability to transcend the boundaries of established knowledge. Despite his one hundred years of age, he shows an enviable intellectual vitality, always renewed and in a continuous search of challenging contributions. I would like to end by quoting the congratulations of João Pedro Stédile, leader of the Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sin Terra (MST) (Landless Rural Workers Movement) on behalf of La Via Campesina and the International Peoples' Assembly: "I want to give a testimony in this centennial celebration: (Don Pablo) is a monument, a bulwark, one of our giants in Latin America (...) Throughout your life you became an example of an intellectual committed to our peoples. And you knew, like few others, how to use science to unravel capitalism (...) You

have always maintained that energy to fight against all social injustices and social inequalities (...) That is why we love him so much”<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Congratulations from João Pedro Stédile sent to Don Pablo on February 11, 2022 through the following video: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H-Bq9le\\_Py4YyDPE2QrEdwtGoRcQhNo-6/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H-Bq9le_Py4YyDPE2QrEdwtGoRcQhNo-6/view)

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# PABLO GONZÁLEZ CASANOVA

**An exceptional personality**

**Jorge Alonso**

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Pablo González Casanova has become one of the most important intellectuals of our time. His 100 years of brilliant and vital teachings on the problems of capitalism in its most destructive tendencies so detrimental to humanity and the planet, along with his commitment to the poor, have been confirmed through decades of research and activism. González Casanova's work has broadened discussions of democracy, imperialism and liberation in Mexico and Latin America in general. Don Pablo's profound look at capitalism's recurrent crises and how they affect people's movements for social justice has implied he reveal in novel ways how ecocide happens and how corporations become *the powers that be*. His work has explored the conditions for war and for peace in these convulsive times, when work and life itself have been reorganized following years of neoliberal globalization. Another of his important contributions has to do with the sciences of complexity, in addition to Don Pablo's consistent promotion of dialogue between the various scientific areas of knowledge. He is well known for his unfailing perspective on radical democracy from below. A quality that distinguishes him is his enormous capacity to combine ideas and concepts in a very vital and profound way such that they illuminate and give clues to continue thinking and asking questions. His many contributions have been written with great care and elegance. His always very active and renewed research work and training of researchers is amazing. The Zapatista movement incorporated him as one of its commanders because of his commitment "never displaying lukewarmness or double-crossing the people." Pablo González Casanova's work has made us see that we have the necessary means to build a world *where many worlds fit*. Don Pablo, as he is best known, is a top-notch scientist as well as a zapatista (known as Contrary Commander) who invites us all to critical thinking and acting in favor of life and of saving our planet.