

AL FARO ZAPATISTA COLLECTION

Walking with Zapatismo, Building Community and Hope

Inés Durán Matute and Rocío Moreno



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CLACSO – Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales – Conselho Latino-americano de Ciências Sociais

Estados Unidos 1168 / C1023AAB Ciudad de Buenos Aires / Argentina /

Tel. [54 11] 4304 9145 / Fax [54 11] 4305 0875

<www.clacso.org> / <clacso@clacsoinst.edu.ar>

Cooperativa Editorial Retos

San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, México

<<https://editorialretos.wordpress.com/>> / <gcuter2016@gmail.com>

FB: <Retos Nodo Chiapas>

Cátedra Jorge Alonso

Calle España 1359, 44190, Guadalajara, Jalisco, México

<<http://www.catedraalonso-ciesas.udg.mx/>> / <occte@ciesas.edu.mx>

Universidad de Guadalajara

Av. Juárez 976, Col. Americana, 44100, Guadalajara, Jalisco, México

<<https://www.udg.mx/>>

This book has been reviewed by anonymous peers, who guarantee its quality, timeliness and relevance.

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WALKING WITH ZAPATISMO, BUILDING COMMUNITY AND HOPE

Inés Durán Matute and Rocío Moreno

In remembering the public appearance of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, Zapatista Army of National Liberation) in 1994, we understand why this moment was crucial and inspiring for native peoples and for a great part of the Mexico from below. Many communities and people saw in the Zapatista struggle, our own struggle as well as our problems, demands, words and history. You, Zapatistas, managed to strip the institutional racism that runs through the veins of the so-called modern Mexican state since its origin. You “re-minded” us the existence of the “Indians” and “exposed” the conditions in which millions of us live day by day in a repressive, predatory, and exploitative state. The initiatives, statements, communiqués, actions and proposals that you have promoted in more than 27 years of public life, teach us the diversity and magnitude of your collective efforts against the attacks suffered in the countryside and the city, here, there, yesterday, and today. Since

that 1st of January, you have filled people hungry for justice with hope and have demonstrated that revolutionary creation is a powerful tool for the making of *other* worlds. You don't just think about the realities of your own communities or of Chiapas but rather understand yourselves as part of something bigger. In this way, you generate initiatives, making us, in all our diversity, part of them.

One of these subjects is the National Indigenous Congress (CNI, Concejo Indígena de Gobierno) created on the 12th of October 1996. This space was born the day that in the Zócalo of Mexico City *Comandanta* Ramona pronounced these words: "We came all the way here to shout, with all the others, that no more, never again, a Mexico without us."¹ In this way, the CNI was constituted as "The House of All the Peoples" (*La Casa de Todos los Pueblos*). It is a space at the margin of political parties, where ethical-political positions are built to advance autonomy and self-management in each of its communities. It is not a physical space, rather a space for gathering, reflection, and to articulate diverse struggles. In the CNI, the struggles of native peoples converge and organize themselves in a network where each one builds and walks alongside their own history, time, and problems. We see the Yaquis defending their river, the Seris protecting the paradise of Isla Tiburón, the Nahuas of Ostula recovering Xayakalan, the Binnizá stopping wind farms and denouncing the In-

¹ Source: <<http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1996/10/12/comandanta-ramona-soy-el-primero-de-muchos-pasos-de-los-zapatis-tas-al-distrito-federal-y-a-todos-los-lugares-de-mexico/>>, accessed on the 20th of August 2021.

teroceanic Corridor, the Purépecha in Cherán organizing through bonfires, the Nahua in the center of the country confronting the Proyecto Integral Morelos (Morelos Integral Project), the Wixárika taking care of Wirikuta and other sacred sites, the Coca positioning from their island of Tlaltequepeque, the Maya impeding the wrongly-named Tren Maya, or the Zapatista communities and the many other peoples that defend life. There have been 25 years of building community with this diversity of peoples and allies to stop racism, dispossession, exploitation, and death.

For you, organization from below and to the left has been your objective from the start. Nonetheless, this past year, you surprised us with your willingness to take this action further. When *Subcomandante* Moisés announced that you would undertake a Journey for Life visiting the five continents, you reminded us that, solutions —not only to a pandemic, but to all that ails us— are collectively built, and thus it is necessary to channel our energies to meet, get to know, and link with each other. This journey seeks to make networks of resistance and rebellion grow through listening, dialogue, denouncement, and organization. They summon all those willing to struggle for life, independently from their nationality, color, culture, or language. In short, this journey shows the urgency of organizing globally, embracing difference, placing life at the center and not below the dictates of the capitalist market. Just knowing what you, Zapatistas, have given to the making of other worlds, we wanted as a tribute to write about the way in which you have inspired the organized communities of the CNI, over these many years. We

are motivated to show the way in which you have walked and stimulated *community* and *hope* from the start. Our aim is to show how today cultivating life requires us to break the times and spaces of Capital.

The Voices

To create this text, we asked some land-defenders and members of CNI about what Zapatismo has given them. We wove their answers with ours, linking the pain, rage, and hope that live in all who believe that a worthy resistance is necessary. The first part of this text focuses on how Zapatismo teaches, accompanies, or inspires us to defend life. The second part gathers the longings that the Journey for Life awakens in us, showing how walking with Zapatismo is about building community and hope in the world. It is a document written in fraternal dialogues between August and September of 2021, seeking to break with traditional ways of doing research. We assume ourselves as part of the collective efforts and, in that sense, we look forward to presenting the weaving of our voices. Although the people we speak with hold their own experiences and perspectives, we don't intend for them to be viewed individually. Their voices represent different communities that lead their own struggles, yet they also assume themselves as part of this larger collective organization that struggles for life.

Now, we introduce the voices that guide this text:

Manuel Jacobo of the Coca community of Mezcala, Jalisco. This community faces an invasion of 11 hectares in

their communal territory due to residential tourism dynamic at the shores of Lago de Chapala (Lake of Chapala). Additionally, the community suffers devastating consequences of the lake's contamination by industries, also carrying sickness to its settlers. Because of this, the Coca community has embarked on legal defense, as well as organizing and constructing autonomous projects such as community tourism, community history workshops, elaboration of its community statute, and revitalization of the Assembly of Commoners.

Maricela Mejía of the Hñahñu community of Santiago Mexquititlán, Querétaro. Since a large part of this community now resides in Mexico City, they have faced strong racism and dismissive attitudes that attempt to "justify" their poor living conditions. Meanwhile, back in Santiago, the dispossession of waters and the touristification promoted by outsiders threaten the community's inhabitants. Facing these two situations, the Hñahñu community has organized sit-ins and mobilizations and has occupied the building that houses the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples in Mexico City since October of last year.

Juan Dionicio of the Hñahñu community of San Pedro Atlapulco, State of Mexico. This community has focused its struggle in conserving its more than 7,000 acres of communal land and the Communal Assembly that protects them. Being 50 kilometers away from Mexico City, its struggle has centered in stopping the dispossession of its waters and lands, preserving its forests, diversifying its production, and rescuing its culture and identity. The Hñahñu community has commu-

nally organized through ecotourism projects that employ and benefit this ancestral town.

Valiana Aguilar of the Maya village of Sinanché, Yucatán. It is besieged by diverse projects that include the planting of genetically modified soybeans, pig farms, tourist corridors, energy parks, and, of course, wrongly-named Tren Maya. Large sectors in Yucatán, along with others in Chiapas, Campeche, and Quintana Roo, are joining forces to confront these attempts to destroy the territory and their lives. Disseminating information, filing appeals, forming assemblies, and providing mutual support are just some of the strategies they are using.

Zapatista Inspirations

We are Dignity

Zapatistas, when you exclaimed “¡Ya Basta!” (Enough is enough!) in 1994, you did it for yourselves as well as for us, to stop the war against all our communities. You also covered your faces, not to hide who you are, but to let us see ourselves reflected in you. The blurry images that were then broadcast on television and various media marked us, impregnated our bodies with dignity.

We have engraved in our memories that day in March 2018, when at the seminar “Indigenous Council of Government: Concejo Indígena de Gobierno: Anti-capitalist and Anti-patriarchal Resistance and Organization from Below and to the Left,” (Concejo Indígena de Gobierno: Resistencia y organización de abajo, a la izquierda, anti-capitalista y antipatriarcal), *doña* Magda, Mazahua resi-

dent of Mexico City and delegate of the CNI, shared with us the harassment, racism, violence, marginalization, dispossession, and insults that pushed her to hide who she is. In the decade of the 1970s, when she sold fruits and seeds in the historic center, she remembers: “They took our merchandise away, cut off our braids, took us to jail for 15 days, stepped all over our merchandise, threw oil and gasoline on it, and took our babies away.”² Upon this scenario she revealed:

We were afraid and hid, forced to change our clothes. We had to wear trousers, curl our lashes, use high heels to go to (school) meetings of our children, so that they would not tell them that they were the sons of India María.

There we understood the reach of your action, *doña Magda* gives thanks that “she has recovered who she is,” not only her way of dressing and talking, but now she feels

...proud because, even if they changed my clothes, what I carry inside, in the blood, no one could take it away from me. And thanks to the struggle that the *compañeros* gave, that they said it was not going to work, it worked at a national and international level, and so, thanks to it, here we are.

Currently, the situation has not changed very much. Indigenous people are still attacked and humiliated for

² Narration recovered from Magdalena García (2018).

seeing, talking, dressing, and living another way. Nonetheless, this dignity gives rise to a pride that implies carrying what is ours without rejecting anyone. Now, *doña* Magda transits the streets looking to collectively build *another* city.

For his part, Juan Dionicio, delegate of San Pedro Atlapulco, remembers that it was at the beginning of the nineties when the first approaches to identity and knowledge as Hñahñu began in his community. This occurred in a context of big fallacies that arrived with the intentions of privatizing lands and life. With “the commemoration of the 500 years of the invasion of America” their approach grew stronger upon “the serious social, political, cultural and economic situation that was suffered in almost all the indigenous communities of Mexico and other countries.” They understood themselves as part of this collective and thanks to the memory they keep where land is not sold, they would not let dispossession occur so easily. However, it was with the “indigenous uprising of the Zapatistas, where they uncovered those accumulated years of marginalization, extermination and disdain, just as other communities experienced and denounced, that there was no going back.” As Juan explains,

These events definitively marked my history and my life. This has meant understanding and committing with the historical project of indigenous peoples, a project and civilizational proposal that goes back ages and that has its essence in land, in the common.

That is to say, to assume oneself with dignity as Hñahñu means to take care of land and forests, to preserve life collectively.

These two experiences lead us to remember events that have affected the historic memory of the Coca community of Mezcala. In neighboring communities, they are contemptuously known as *chantes*, that is, *indios* with a long list of adjectives like foolish, dirty, *patarrajada*, or *nacos*. In Jalisco, a state that imagines itself as “white,” mistreatment has been such that the people from Mezcala forgot their origin and many even wanted to leave their “indigenous” past behind. Nonetheless, others have seen *hope* in Zapatismo, because, as Manuel, delegate of the community says, “we quickly felt identified with their struggle as our communities have gone through similar processes of discrimination, erasure, racism, classism, and many other things that we identify with.” In this way, Zapatismo paved the way for them to examine “our identity, our traditions, our authority, and to begin reformulating the way in which we wanted the world to see us.” Even a community assembly was called to discuss if they were indigenous or not. In the end they decided to consult their elders and study their history. Together they went through a process of remembering their origins as Coca people and began to transmit and affirm a collective memory to understand who they are and strengthen their ties. Today they are proud; they claim the word indigenous, assuming themselves as past, present, and future, as continuity and change. What’s more, they dignify their indigeneity to break with classifications and structures of power, organize alternatives, defend land and create

other relationships and ways of being, thinking and living.³ The Coca don't understand themselves as the State paints them to be, they associate themselves with justice, respect, and autonomy.

In a similar way, the Hñahñu of Santiago Mexquititlán fight to make “dignity a custom and habit”, like Estela Hernández, a community defender, has taught us. In 2006, she started a struggle to achieve the freedom of her mother and today she keeps demonstrating her commitment with the dignification of communities by accompanying the occupation of INPI.⁴ On the 12th of October 2020, the Otomi community, which is the way those who reside in Mexico City present themselves, occupied such installations for “the dignity of our peoples”, demanding respect to their rights, the cancellation of megaprojects, and the cease of attacks against Zapatista communities and peoples of the CNI.⁵ This act of solidarity can be understood when one knows what the Zapatista struggle means to them. Maricela, *concejala* Otomi, explained to us that it is about,

a struggle of identity, where we feel identified, where we saw that we were listened to regarding the problem that we had as community in Mexico City, where indigenous people like us that speak their native language and wear traditional clothes, have no place.

³ See Durán (2021).

⁴ To go deeper, see Hernández (2020).

⁵ See Redacción (2020).

While for governments “indigenous peoples do not exist,” Maricela thanks you, Zapatistas, for “looking at them as siblings fighting for their land and territory, fighting to get ahead and be heard”. Therefore, the occupation of INPI has been their ¡Enough! in the face of racism, injustice, and death that has not ceased after 528 years. It is their way of saying that they are not willing to be subjects of “development” nor decorative pieces; they exist in resistance and rebellion.

This dignity has not only blossomed in indigenous communities but has also grown in a diversity of lives and geographies. Inés, one of the authors of this text, recalls when she first assisted to one of your events: the First Global Festival of Dignified Rage (Primer Festival Mundial de la Digna Rabia). The words that summoned us to the event are engraved in her memory:

There is no ear to our pain that it is not the one of whom,
like us, is.

We are no one.

Alone we are and only with our dignity and our rage.

Rage and dignity are our bridges, our languages.

Let's listen to each other, get to know each other.

So that our courage grows, and hope is made.

So that dignity is rooted again and another world is born.⁶

⁶ Source: <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2008/09/15/comunicado-del-ccri-cg-del-ezln-comision-sexta-comision-intergalactica-del-ezln/>, accessed on the 3rd of September 2021.

Such words opened up Ines' perspective, she understood the consistent danger of being absorbed by the logic of capital and thus saw the necessity of creating other relationships that could stop contempt and injustice. She decided to start a path that she walks alongside those who make theirs the pains of the land and who dream with building another world.

Maybe it is obvious why native peoples in Mexico identify with you, Zapatistas, maybe it is understandable that others in this Mexican geography also do. But why would someone in Europe or Africa identify? You have been encouragement for dignities and bridges of our rage that multiply our hopes here and there. For years now, you have taught us to understand our local realities from a global perspective. The massive death that has been generated by a colonial and patriarchal capitalism forces us to respond at a planetary scale with an organization from below that positions, again and with urgency, life at the center. You have shown us an interest for creating global spaces of encounter that allow us to understand how our pains and problems are generated by the same political and economic system and that, thus, the answer must be built everywhere, from Mexico to South Africa. Your new initiative, the Journey for Life, is thus framed in this necessary and urgent struggle. But before we go into it, let's get to know how you have strengthened, inspired, and extended the women's struggle.



Occupation of the INPI by the Otomi community resident in Mexico City, 2020. Photo: Inés Durán Matute.

As Women who Struggle

“¡Without women there is no revolution!” Not only did you shout this phrase, but you revolutionized your beliefs and practices to make antipatriarchal struggle effective. The first images that we saw that 1st of January of 1994 were not only of men, but also of women carrying weapons. We realized that there were *comandantas* and *insurgentas*, women that broke all the stereotypes of being a “woman”. A year before going out to public light, the EZLN had already had its first battle, one that was also was internal, one where women stopped their *compañeros* and demanded a dignified place. This resulted in the writing and implementation of the Revolutionary Law of Women (Ley Revolucionaria de las Mujeres). How many territories, organisms, unions, or universities have a law that explicitly includes women and defends their rights? How many of these laws are written by women and applied to real life? Without doubt, Zapatista women modeled for us the enormous task that we should make real in our spaces, as women who struggle, we must make ourselves visible, demand respect, and decide about our lives.

For Rocío, one of the authors of these lines, the struggle of Zapatista women has been exemplary and encouraging. In her own community there are several women who are involved in territory defense. Her mother, cousins, aunts, and friends taught her the importance of this struggle. In 2002, some of them, alongside men from the community who sympathized with the Zapatista struggle, created the *Colectivo Mezcala*. It was a formative space where they read texts and watched videos of you, Zapa-

tistas. In 2004 they managed to go to Chiapas to meet you in the frame of the preparatory meetings of what later would become La Otra Campaña. To arrive and be in rebel territories changed them; it pushed them to get more involved in their community affairs. In 2006, the *comandantas* Miriam and Gabriela, together with delegates of CNI, visited Mezcala to celebrate the National Forum in Defense of the Mother Earth and the Autonomy of Indigenous Peoples (Foro Nacional en Defensa de la Madre Tierra y la Autonomía de los Pueblos Indígenas). For the women of the community, this event was a breakthrough. Listening to two other women who struggle for their community and their lives, they understood that it is not just about facing the community's territorial problems, but also of struggling as women that we are. Although in various and unique ways, Coca women have struggled all along for their community, in their census only eight women from the 406 commoners were recognized. Today, 12 more have been integrated but women from the community will not have a place until a greater balance is reached in their participation both in number and form. In this sense, the Zapatista women keep on inspiring them with their example and day-to-day revolutionary practices.

For some women that are members of CNI, the incorporation of the antipatriarchal struggle to their communities and national organization has meant enrichment. Learning from you, Zapatistas, must be accompanied with practice, with the materialization of ideals for the emancipation of women in daily life. Otherwise, learning is limited. It is in this way that throughout the North, Sou-

th, Center, and West of Mexico, these women exercise their right to life and to the autonomy of their communities with their languages, embroidery, flavors, stories, and colors. Perhaps one of the greatest achievements in opening space for women, was the nomination of María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, also known as Marichuy, a Nahuatl woman from Tuxpan, Jalisco, as spokeswoman of the Indigenous Governing Council (CIG, Concejo Indígena de Gobierno). In this occasion it was decided that as *concejales* they had to name a man and a woman from each people with the intention of positioning native women. It is not to satisfy a “quota,” rather an effort to transform organization, giving it another gaze, arrangement, and purpose.

In this way, the inspiration and example that Zapatista women give us arrives in diverse ways to each one of the women that are part of the CNI. For example, Valiana, Mayan delegate, shares with us her experience related to Zapatismo:

I was born in '93. [...] In our generation the opportunity to get to know Zapatismo was afforded to us in another way, from the transmission of oral history, from its importance and the events that have occurred after the uprising. [...] In our generation one can see a generalized feeling that we can no longer do something, that our future has been sold, and that it was sold even before we were born. So, having as a reference this level of autonomy and the possibility of creating other conditions of living that are based in our knowledge as communities and not in what is imposed to us by the institutions, has impacted me as a woman [...] Knowing that

other women like us have been able to have that capacity of construction, of another way of existing, that is not existence under violence, under a patriarchal system that oppresses us, has also been of much importance.

This testimony shows us how the long path of the participation of the *compañeras* is just beginning. For Valiana it has been the encounters and organization processes with other native *compañeras*, as in the conformation of the CIG, that has given her,

the opportunity of learning that sometimes we did not participate much in assemblies, but that our voice is there, and our participation is there. And it exists from community life; I mean the small things that build autonomy in a historic and long-term process.

Women in their community have transformed perspectives and are opening their participation in various spaces. Also, today, the preparation of a plate, the cultivation of plants, and the use of traditional medicine are all understood as daily actions they undertake as part of a major historical process of resistance and creation of community.

For her part, Maricela tells us how you, Zapatistas, are an example of struggle, resistance and autonomy that have inspired her as an Otomi woman. She admires the way in which women in the community bases struggle and organize, as is seen in their different commissions and in the International Gatherings of Women Who Struggle. Thus, Maricela considers that “to us, as Otomi

community, it has inspired us a lot and has given us a reflection that women like us know how to organize, struggle, and transform a new world [...] where many of us fit." The occupation of INPI, in this sense, is a mobilization made possible and sustained by Otomi *compañeras* still a year later. We see then images of them in which with their traditional clothes they give another meaning to their clothing, to what they are and do. They organize and struggle, demanding to be heard and taken into account as women and people. Also, they rebel against the impositions, humiliations, and dispossessions, bearing in mind how "the Zapatista siblings have been struggling for years, and they are a great exposition, a great example, wherever they go, they wear their clothing, they speak their language. So then, we must recover that part that many peoples have lost." As we saw in the previous section, wearing their clothing and speaking their language is also a fundamental part of their resistance, of continuing to be Otomi in the big city.

Such scenes, where women are the protagonists of rebellions, had not been seen before. Now that the "indigenous" struggle comes together with the "antipatriarchal" struggle we see emerge before us images that attack racism and *machismo* in parallel. In this context, the teachings of Zapatista women are encouraging. The simple fact of seeing *comandantas*, *milicianas*, or civil authorities in charge, is inspiring and critical to the interior of each one of the communities. For Marcela, the same as for Valiana, it is urgent to break the patriarchal siege with their *compañeros* and strengthen the struggle of women with an active participation of all its members. Thus, they

see a richness of learnings with Zapatista and CNI women when they listen to their experiences, struggles, and to how they have articulated and organized. Within the communities, we began to see these efforts sprout where new proposals are discussed and where new ways of relating are agreed upon, where gender stops mattering. However, both inside and outside of communities, there is still a long way to disassemble *machismo* and patriarchal practices that are profoundly rooted in our societies. Therefore, communities, collectives, organizations, and people that struggle for life must join to shout: "Without women there is no revolution!"



Visit of Marichuy and the Indigenous Governing Council to the Coca community of Mezcala, Jalisco, 2017. Photo: Inés Durán Matute.

We Build Autonomy

When the counter reform was made,⁷ you, Zapatistas, decided and announced that you would abandon dialogue and negotiation with the state and would continue building your autonomy *de facto*. The Juntas de Buen Gobierno have materialized practices and relationships that strengthen the organizational structures to solve problems and improve collective life in your communities. This form of organization has allowed you to show that anticapitalist ways of being, thinking, and living are possible. These ways have also inspired various other communities, organizations, collectives and people to trace their own path. But what do we imagine when we think autonomy outside Chiapas?

Maybe it leads us to think about the expulsion of political parties in Cherán, the community police in the Montaña Baja de Guerrero, the defense of water in Juan C. Bonilla, the recovery of lands in Ostula, the construction of an autonomous community clinic in Azqueltán, or the multiple community radios in Oaxaca. There are so many images, so many tones and ways that lead us to dream with this other world. This positioning has meant an enormous effort to face a capitalist way of life where organized and politized people get in the way. Autonomy can then be related to our ways of government, the de-

⁷ In 2001, the Mexican government betrayed the Agreements of San Andres by making a constitutional reform that did not respond to the most important demands of the native peoples, such as autonomy, the rights to their territories and to be subjects of public law.

fense of territory, or to the control over our own lives and futures. It echoes our annoyances and desires through the way of facts. Some do not name it in such way, but we know that in various forms they remit to practices that search to guarantee the reproduction of life. The recent words of the CNI-CIG show us how you have illuminated paths and inspired struggles with this objective:

Zapatista brothers/sisters, older brothers/sisters⁸, like always your words and initiatives generate a light of hope and path for our peoples, the megaprojects, the transnational companies, the organized crime and its coordination with the government invade us more each time to exploit and finish with our territory, with life. The lying words of López Obrador and his so-called Forth Transformation intend to create a wall that hides the war that is raging against the peoples and life of Mother Earth, wanting to isolate and present us as opponents to progress, something that previous governments already accused us of, but that today takes on a more destructive meaning. Our word, our reality, the war we live does not reach all the hearts that it must reach, because we not only defend our territory, with it we defend the life of Mother Earth and the future of humanity.⁹

⁸ In Spanish they use: “Herman@s zapatistas, herman@s mayores” to mark gender neutrality.

⁹ Source: <<https://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/2021/01/28/pronunciamento-de-la-quinta-asamblea-entre-el-congreso-nacional-indigena-y-el-concejo-indigena-de-gobierno/>>, accessed on the 6th of September 2021.

The spaces propitiated by the EZLN as by the CNI have been useful to various communities, as Valiana mentions, for

weaving a network of communities that support and learn from each other, especially from the processes of dispossession that we live, to know that we are not isolated and that it corresponds to a logic of a capitalist, patriarchal, and predatory system that wants to displace us and take our lands.

In such way, they provide knowledge and tools to different communities for their struggles. For example, for Juan, in San Pedro Atlapulco, this is what the Zapatista influence has meant in his community life:

To deepen and participate directly in the life of the community, [...] that goes from the recognition of its origin and history, passing through the traditional responsibilities and authority of its traditional government, in the assemblies, in its problems, in the construction of its autonomy.

Besides, he considers that their organizational experience has been useful to “share with the peoples of the region, participating and supporting their demands”. The Atlapulco struggle shows how the historical processes of resistance and reconstitution have allowed them to achieve certain degree of autonomy. The clarity of this community that takes care of its forests, life, enables them to keep the management of their territory, setting the tone in negotiations with external authorities.

For their part, in Mezcala, the National Forum in Defense of Mother Earth and the Autonomy of Indigenous Peoples —mentioned before— propitiated a space of exchange of histories, problems, struggles, ideas, and visions that helped them understand the existence of other ways. As a result, like Manuel tells us, “The word autonomy, and all that it implies, started to sound with greater strength” in the community. They articulated it to the defense of the territory against expropriation of their island by the government and the privatization of one of their hills by a businessman. In the face of these threats that appeared in the name of tourism and development, the community then decided to reinforce its assembly, modify its community statutes and strengthen vigilance and care for the territory.¹⁰ Besides, a diversity of inhabitants convinced that autonomy is the way and inspired by the struggle that they had known, in fact, in San Pedro Atlapulco wanted to show “that another progress could be made.” This was how *Paraje Insurgente* was born in 2013, a restaurant and space for gathering that promotes other ways of organization and learning, and a form of community tourism based on a historical memory of resistance. Although it’s had its own problems, this effort has been useful to imagine and plan broader community projects, like a university.

Geography in Mexico is crossed by multiple attempts at dispossession, an inhumane exploitation and raw racism, that are not alien to any community. For Otomís residing in Mexico City, this was evident in their poor living condi-

¹⁰ To know more about this struggle, see Durán (2019) and Hipólito (2015).

tions during the pandemic; they could not count on water, food, and housing to cope with the disease. They shouted: “If Covid-19 doesn’t kill us, hunger will.” Due to the anger of living in those conditions, they occupied the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI) to demand that they be heard and struggle for autonomy and dignity. Meanwhile, in Santiago Mexquititlán, its inhabitants saw themselves threatened by the construction of a public square to attract tourism and the plundering of water from their community well by private companies. In the face of this last conflict, they set up a sit-in, closed the highway, and created community assemblies to demand that water return to the community (Ruiz y Bernal 2021). They declared: “The path is resistance, organization, autonomy, free determination, and self-government to guarantee water as the most fundamental condition for the survival and health of this community.”¹¹ Facing this scenario, Maricela explains, “The dispossession of water is strong now and we are seeing this happen in all communities, it’s coming on strong [...] Only being in solidarity, like with our Zapatista brothers, being with them, do we know that we are going to defeat (this problem).” The attempt is for “autonomy so that we are all of value all the time,” as they expressed to us one day.¹² For this to happen, it is necessary to build a more united front,

¹¹ Source: Redacción (2021).

¹² Source: <<https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2005/12/31/discurso-de-la-junta-de-buen-gobierno-el-camino-del-futuro-el-31-de-diciembre-de-2005-english-translation/>>, accessed on the 30th of August 2021.

to create processes of global articulation to struggle for life,
like they keep on teaching us.



Forest in San Pedro Atlapulco, State of Mexico, 2006. Photo: Manuel Jacobo Contreras.

Navigating through life

They did not Conquer Us

“History is written by the victors.” This known phrase expressed by George Orwell implies denying that other stories have been written in parallel by the supposedly defeated. It is time for our stories to be known, for other possibilities to be opened in time.

From an officialist vision, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has tried since March 2019 to get both Spanish king Phillip VI and the Pope Francisco to apologize for the wrongs done during the conquest and colonization of native peoples. This is how Lopez Obrador requested it in a letter: “we must offer a public apology to the native peoples that suffered from the disgraceful atrocities to plunder their goods and lands and submit them, since the Conquest of 1521 until recent past.”¹³ As an answer, you, Zapatistas, said that you would go to Europe to say that they don’t need to apologize, as you were NOT conquered. You gave us a great history lesson when seven of you, the 421st Squadron, set sail from the Yucatan peninsula to the old continent to initiate gatherings with organized collectives that are in struggle for life there. Your message flipped so-called official history. It has placed in perspective that there are still other ways of life, that the memory of struggle and resistance is still alive and can write another reality.

¹³ Source: <<https://presidente.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/CARTA-AL-PAPA-FRANCISCO.pdf>>, accessed on the 30th of August 2021.

In turn, in face of the worsening of dispossession and extermination, the CNI-CIG saw the need to raise their voice and organize, of telling the “true history.” For them, hope has been safeguarded because communities don’t look at their territories with the eyes of money. The CNI and CIG expressed: “They did not end us. We remain all of us who are in resistance and rebellion, those who venerate Mother Earth and who, five centuries after, we not only have territories, but we safeguard them with our lives.”¹⁴ Meanwhile, on the 13th of August, 500 years after the fall of Tenochtitlan, when the 421st Squadron arrived in Madrid, they shared another very different message. They emphasized that they were there to learn, dialogue, listen to stories of resistance and to start an organizational process with all the differences that we are. In unison from Mexico, it was also shouted: “¡Here we are! ¡We were not conquered! ¡We exist because we resist!” An example was in how the Otomí community transformed the occupation of INPI into the “House of the peoples and indigenous communities, Samir Flores Soberanes” (Casa de los pueblos y las comunidades indígenas, Samir Flores Soberanes). They did not only do it as an act of rejection to the commemoration of this event, but “because our Zapatista brothers summoned us to defy the capitalist system, to defy the political class, to defy the owners of

¹⁴ Source: <<https://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/2021/07/27/llamado-del-cni-cig-a-participar-en-la-iniciativa-nacional-por-la-vida-promovida-por-el-ezln-y-a-la-accion-dislocada-a-500-anos-del-inicio-de-la-resistencia/>>, accessed on the 31st of August 2021.

power and money, to defy an established order that they impose.”¹⁵

Facing continuous attempts of pillage now seen in the megaprojects planned by the Fourth Transformation government along with persistent exclusion and racism, Maricela explains that it is necessary to “plant the seed;” to share and build an *other history*, one of resistance and rebellion, to make it grow. From the CNI-CIG, they decided to bring listening and speaking, along with you, Zapatistas, who resist in the renamed Europe, *Slumil k’ajx-emk’op* (Rebellious Land), to make organization grow. This because, as they expressed in the campaign The Isthmus is Ours (El Istmo es Nuestro): “We must add, not divide, be fraternal and in solidarity, critical and self-critical, join diversity and differences to stop this Megaproject of death and all that threatens life.”¹⁶

This history of resistance that the peoples are writing began to come to the light with declarations like the one of the Mayan people. They have turned upside down the history of the Caste War, where there was a massacre against the Mayan people who rebelled against being subjugated and enslaved. Today they learn and preserve the memory of struggle that their grandparents left to continue walking towards autonomy and stop the passage of

¹⁵ Source: <<https://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/2021/08/13/a-500-anos-del-inicio-de-la-resistencia-no-nos-conquistaron-seguimos-en-resistencia-y-rebeldia-2/>>, accessed on the 31st of August 2021.

¹⁶ Source: <<https://www.caminoalandar.org/post/no-nos-conquistaron-resistimos>>, accessed on the 31st of August 2021.

the wrongly-named Tren Maya. They understand that, in a different way, the ethnocide and the attempts to dispossess them from their territory remain active. In their words: “The sugar and sisal estates transformed into the touristic resorts of the Mayan Riviera and gave place to other forms of oppression of the peoples.”¹⁷ But they also assume themselves as the “daughters and sons of history” that “will keep on fighting this war for the freedom of our people, we will continue building our so longed-for autonomy.” In a similar way, the Indigenous and Popular Council of Guerrero - Emiliano Zapata (Concejo Indígena y Popular de Guerrero - Emiliano Zapata, CIPOG-EZ) questioned the so-called Conquest of Mexico, since even when there was clearly suffering, dispossession and extermination,

there were peoples, entire communities in resistance that were able to preserve their languages, cultures, traditions, and beliefs; that maintained the relationship with the land and the natural goods that the invader pretended to destroy. Men and women of maize that resisted becoming

¹⁷ Source: <<https://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/2021/07/31/pronunciamiento-de-la-campana-u-jeetsel-le-kiki-kuxtal-en-el-aniversario-del-inicio-de-la-lucha-social-maya-de-1847/>>, accessed on the 30th of August 2021.

history of the past and maintained memory for future generations.¹⁸

In all the corners of the world capitalism has sought to take hold through a history of ambition and destruction. Nonetheless, native peoples are still standing and maintain their historical memory to resist attempts to end with them and with life. In sharing our words to write other stories, we manage to keep that which gives us life, whether is a language or a festivity, a territory or an assembly, a jaguar or a river. Navigating towards *Slumil k'ajxemk'op* is to go against that official history that wants to erase it all in the interest of power and capital. It is an attempt to radiate our stories of resistance to break with the system and its fictions.

Let's Sow Organization

In 2016, when the CNI had its twentieth anniversary, they took on a collective balance—a review and reflection—on the situation that communities face. The scenario was discouraging, even with the construction of autonomous spaces and networks of solidarity, the conditions that a colonial and patriarchal capitalism creates were found to be more violent, and therefore, life was depleted with greater speed and rapture. This balance was made in

¹⁸ Source: <<https://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/2021/08/13/posicionamiento-del-cipog-ez-a-500-anos-de-la-llamada-conquista-de-mexico-aqui-seguimos-no-nos-rendimos-no-nos-ven-demos-no-claudicamos/>>, accessed on the 31st of August 2021.

Chiapas with you, Zapatistas, and it was agreed to start a consultation that would be taken to each assembly of the communities that participate in the CNI. The consultation was simple: Is the creation of an Indigenous Governing Council (CIG) necessary? Should this Council name a spokesperson? Should this spokesperson participate in the presidential elections of 2018? This was how in May 2017 the CIG was conformed, and Marichuy was named as its spokeswoman. This initiative sought, once again, to generate ties and articulation of struggles not only between native peoples, but also with workers of the countryside and the city, teachers, women, youth, artists, migrants, people with disabilities, to name some sectors.

Since the beginning, the intention was to sow organization. Power was never sought, what was sought was to create profound dialogues within the Mexico from below. Soon, thousands of sympathizers joined who were not limited by the borders of national geography. During 2017, you had also started a global campaign, "In the Face of Capital's Walls: Resistance, Rebellion, Solidarity, and the Support from Below and to the Left," to resist the proliferation of walls and borders. For us, with time, these two initiatives mixed and gave way to the Journey for Life. It is true, there have been several years that you have put out a call from Chiapas to gathering with the native peoples and civil society, both Mexican and international. Resistances from other geographies see their struggles mirrored, for example, Kurdish women, the mothers of Black Lives Matter and the Mapuche peoples come to your encounter and discover their place in the Mexican Southeast. You have suggested that organization

must be at a planetary scale, and that this moment deems it urgent to trespass borders and overthrow the walls of capital to take care of life, stop war against humanity, and build those other worlds. For life, we need not only to write our stories, but also to trace our own geographies.

In this way, we understand the Journey for Life as an attempt to globalize that which in different spaces has been conceived as the Struggle for Life. As Juan comments:

Capitalism wrecks havocs all over the world. The Zapatista journey, in its first moment to Europe, means the opportunity to meet people, collectives, organizations and peoples that face local and transnational interests that impose big projects and politics in their territories, in their cities, in the spaces where they live which tend to deteriorate or destroy the conditions for dignified life.

People are conscious that life is not negotiable; because of this, there is an urgency to establish these links, these synchronicities of resistance. It is needed, in Maricela's words, "to take the word, the voice so that other brothers/sisters in other continents realize that they are not the only ones that live that terrible dispossession." Besides, it is about building ties, like Manuel explains, to "struggle against capitalism, to be united, put up a single fight."

The intention is to think together about what it means to struggle for life and how it should be done. For all the voices in this text, the Journey for Life represents *hope*; a hope to know that we are still alive, to communicate our

voice and listen to others, to meet each other and walk together, to join our worthy rages and build other ways of life. But, like Juan also mentions, “it is the opportunity to return those visits, carry the word of organization, rebellion and resistance, also to support, know and strengthen other struggles and resistances that are fought in other fronts of the world against the decisions of big capital.” The people who are visited have been close to Zapatista thought, but the visit is not exclusive, rather is expansive to grow and strengthen our organization. It is about how we “weave and harmonize our collective and community efforts in defense of life,” as Valiana mentions. For her, the Journey for Life:

like its name says, it is for life, for us who are struggling from our own spaces to dismantle this system of death that oppresses us. We do it with the tools in our hands, from the knowledges of communities, from the systems of organization to govern our life, or from women and the labor to preserve this care and embody the territorial struggle.

While the government asks for “apologies” for past military occupations yet hides the ones that persist, communities, collectives and people that live in the Mexican geography and beyond, with imagination create a front to stop war and extermination. They struggle for life, as an everyday act of survival in the face of growing violence of a predatory capitalism: harassment, repression, evictions, persecutions, threats, destruction and catastrophe, missing people, and deaths. They also organize to take care of their territories, and all that word implies: land

and water, forest and jungle, the humans and non-humans, history, festivities, language, and myths—all that which before we identified as a collective that generates and conserves life.¹⁹ As this also for you, Zapatistas, “Living is not just about not dying, about surviving: living as human beings means living with freedom. Living is about art, science, joy, dance, and struggle.”²⁰ Although for those who live in other geographies, like *Slumil k’ajxemk’op*, the struggle for life might be different, they will always share the rage that seeks to impede the world from being taken away from us, that the land and those of us who live in and with it, to be killed. The Struggle for Life is an attempt to meet and mutually recognize to join our dreams and listen to each other’s pains, always respecting our differences. Only in this way will we understand our interdependence and learn to walk hand-in-hand.

¹⁹ See Durán and Moreno (2021).

²⁰ Source: <<https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/08/17/only-500-years-later/>>, accessed on the 7th of September 2021.



“No al Tren Maya” (No to the Mayan Train) as part of the global action “No más ataques a comunidades zapatistas” (No more attacks to Zapatista communities), Berlin, Germany, 2021. Photo: Inés Durán Matute.

Reflecting Retrospectively

The multiple Zapatista initiatives, that have come about since that 1st of January of 1994, have shown fragments of a struggle that has inspired thousands here and there. As one can see in the organized communities of the CNI, it has made us dignity, to struggle as women and to build autonomy. Nonetheless, the death that this colonial and patriarchal capitalist system has generated in the planet keeps moving forward. Life runs out and thousands of people are pushed to transit in a territory of uncertainties, of war. Many are turning to see “their people” generating greater divisions and confrontations. Yet there are others that have engaged in the construction of resistance and rebellion networks at a planetary scale to gather the strength and creativity to end with this evil that inhabits us.

Walking with Zapatismo is about building community and hope in the world, of sowing organization, without impositions nor hierarchies, limits nor lapses. This seems to be the way to cultivate life. Like this, your struggle must be understood as a continuous process that has led to a navigating through life. Therefore, this journey is about continuing writing those stories of resistance, but also of daring to draw those maps that defy the separations imposed by capital.

¡Let's transform times and spaces! ¡Let's create new dimensions!

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About the Authors



Inés Durán Matute

Researcher-activist. Doctor of Social Sciences. Since 2008, she has accompanied the Coca community of Mezcala (Jalisco, Mexico) in defending their territory, history, rights, and ways of being and living. She walks with the Struggle for Life promoted by various peoples and collectives. She is part of the International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counterstrategies of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. She writes books on these topics, including one entitled *Indigenous Peoples and the Geographies of Power*. Together with Rocío Moreno, she published the book entitled *La lucha por la vida frente a los megaproyectos en México*.

<i.duranmatute@gmail.com>.



Rocío Moreno

Comunera of the Coca community of Mezcala, Jalisco. Historian from the University of Guadalajara. Since 2008, she has been conducting community history workshops of and in Mezcala. These workshops have produced educational materials for children and young people, which strengthen their identity as an indigenous people. Her master's and doctoral academic work has centered on the history of Mezcala, particularly on territorial matters and the participation of Coca women. Her publications focus on the struggles of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. She writes for *Desinformémonos*.

<morenorocio22@gmail.com>.

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 “cisheteronormativity,” as the sexual diversities in motion and re-existence call it.

Editorial and Organising Committee

Xochitl Leyva Solano
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AL FARO ZAPATISTA COLLECTION

Since January 1, 1994, the Zapatista communities have filled a people hungry for justice with hope and have demonstrated that revolutionary creation is a powerful tool for building *other* worlds. They do not think only of the reality of their villages or of Chiapas but see themselves as part of something bigger. In this way, they generate initiatives that make the diversity of us part of them. One such initiative is the National Indigenous Congress (CNI), a space for gathering, reflection, and articulation of the struggles of the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

In this sense, we wanted to pay tribute by writing about how the Zapatistas have inspired the organized communities of the CNI for years. We were motivated to show how, from the beginning, they have walked and stimulated *community and hope*. This is in order to highlight the current need to get involved on a planetary scale to break the times and spaces of capital. Thus, we perceive in their current initiative, the Journey for Life, an urgent search to place life at the center and not under the domination of the market.

