



From Solidarity Anti-Capitalism

The public appearance of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico, on 1 January 1994, exposed a racist and elitist state that did not guarantee the most basic demands of its citizens. The EZLN was born as an armed movement with an indigenous base, but soon became a source for daily political practice in the fight for land, work, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace. It awakened minds and nourished hearts, pushing to imagine and create worlds that respect *other* ways, times, and geographies.

With this in mind, the Zapatistas founded the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) in 1996, a space for meeting, dialogue, analysis, and connection for all the native peoples of Mexico. The CNI is currently composed of 43 native peoples, each bringing its own culture, history, and challenges. Its intention is to be a network that strengthens struggles and ways of organization, representation, and decision-making, breaking away from the practices of old politics that rely on institutionalism and the seizure of power.

The emergence of the EZLN has been a watershed moment that inaugurated a new way of doing politics: a way that is more horizontal, and through which each people resolves its problems

without waiting for state assistance. These *other* politics have their origin in the national events of 2001. The hegemonic party that had governed for 71 years lost the elections, giving way for a new government. People began to talk of a transition to democracy. However, the continued exclusion of native populations and the strong authoritarian component of the state soon

became evident.

As a result, the EZLN broke off negotiations with the federal government and opted for *de facto* autonomy. Operating in this way, it has been able to implement its forms of organization and government, as well as its educational, pro-



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Globalizing Other Politics from Below and to the Left

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ductive, health, justice, and communication systems to improve the living conditions of the communities. The intention of the EZLN was not only to fight for and with the native peoples, but also for and with “all the exploited and dispossessed”, as announced in the Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona (2005). Their goal was to create a national program of anti-capitalist struggle through

“another way of doing politics, one which once again has the spirit of serving others, without material interests, with sacrifice, with dedication, with honesty, which keeps its word, whose only payment is the satisfaction of duty performed ...”.

The CNI ratified the Sixth Declaration, exercising their rights and *de facto* autonomy – and they continue to do so. In both the EZLN and the CNI, *other* politics from below and to the left took shape, where one “walks asking questions” guided by seven principles:

*To Serve Others, not Serve Oneself
To Represent, not Supplant
To Construct, not Destroy
To Obey, not Command
To Propose, not Impose
To Convince, not Defeat
To Go Down, not Up*

Women, men, and *otroas*¹, with faces covered by balaclavas and bandanas, became a symbol of the movement, making space for a poetic-political organization against capitalism. They inspired the native population, as well as thousands of people in Mexico and across the world, to practice their own form of alternative politics.

The three tiers of the struggle

For the organized communities of the CNI and the EZLN, the struggle has to take place on three scales: local, national and global. For example, a CNI delegate carries her own struggle, her demands as a community, but she also participates in the national struggle as a native person, and globally as a woman and an exploited person. This was most evident in 2016, on the 20th anniversary of the founding of the CNI, when an assessment was made together with the Zapatista communities about the current situation of its peoples.

It was concluded that the situation is devastating, as there are more dead, disappeared, imprisoned, and displaced people as a result of a war that entered another gear in 2006. The country was militarized, provoking greater repression and criminalization of social struggles in defence of life and territory. It was therefore decided to consult in 523 assemblies nationally on the formation of an Indigenous Council of Government (CIG) that would carry out three tasks: to travel across the country and invite all those who feel part of a grass-roots movement in Mexico to organize; to position the problems of native peoples on a national level at the juncture of the presidential election; and to participate in these elections not to take power, but to break into the spaces of the political class.

The creation of the CIG was approved and made up of one man and one woman from each CNI community, 180 council members in total. In addition, María de Jesús Patricio “Marichuy” from the Nahuatl people, founder of the CNI and doctor of traditional medicine from Tuxpan, Jalisco, was appointed spokesperson of the CIG. Together they toured Mexico under the pretext of collecting signatures for her registration as an independent candidate for the presidency. In reality, they held dialogues on other forms of organization and called for the creation of networks of resistance and rebellion.



Imagine hundreds of people in Mexico shouting “¡Mujeres rebeldes, conscientes y valientes!” (Rebellious, conscious, and brave women!) accompanied by a loud “¡Que muera el sistema capitalista!” (Let the capitalist system die!). These voices coming together in unison were to encourage Marichuy and the CIG to unmask elitist and racist politics, and the simulated democracy that excludes the people from decision-making. Moreover, they called out the worsening dispossession, war, poverty, disinte-



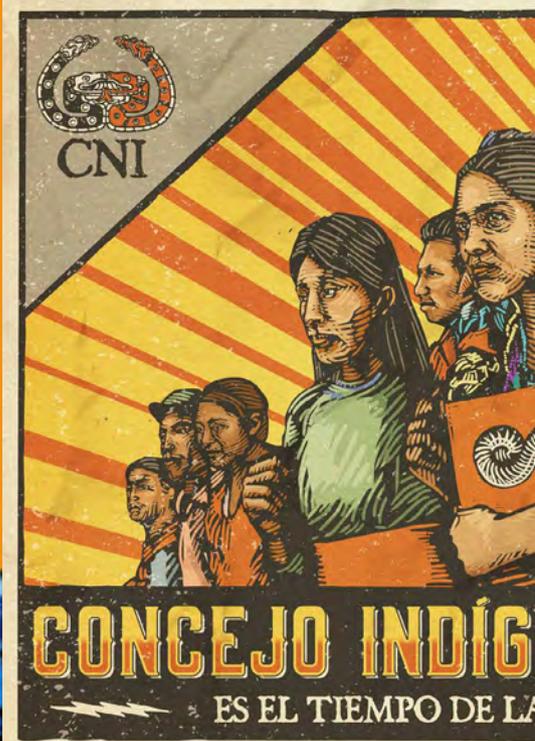
gration, and exploitation. As a counteroffer, they listened and articulated the words, pains, and longings of the communities. This showed how resistance can imagine another reality, one that projects colour, dignity, life, and hope. This anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal, and anti-capitalist proposal toured 62 towns and cities in Mexico. Some saw it as a passing event, but for many it became a symbol of defending life and building other futures in Mexico and the world. It is not the first time that the

Zapatistas were involved in such a proposal, as they have sought to be a bridge to unite different struggles in the world and create “a world where many worlds fit”. Zapatismo is considered one of the greatest examples of internationalism, not only because of the way thousands around the world have shown solidarity with their struggle, but also because of its anti-capitalism and defence of humanity.

The Sixth Declaration made the need for a global anti-capitalist organization apparent. The Sexta Internacional was established and has served to support, denounce, and watch over the security, freedom, and respect of Zapatista communities, as well as growing and strengthening the networks of resistance and rebellion. The formation of the CIJ and its subsequent tour was a strategy to reactivate local and national organization. However, to defend life, the organization must be able to cross and break all borders.

The Journey for Life

In 2015, the Zapatistas warned that a catastrophe was coming, so it was necessary to come together to reflect on what others observed and how to resist. With the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, the prognosis was obvious – the civilizational crisis was exposed and exacerbated. In October 2020 the Zapatistas announced that, in the face of the fast approaching collapse, they would travel the world looking not for differences, but for what makes us equal. The first stop would be Europe; to listen, learn, thank, and embrace the resistances and rebellions that are fighting for life.



On 1 January 1 2021, they launched the *Declaración por la vida* (declaration for life), which has been signed by thousands of people, collectives, and organizations from at least 65 territories. The intention is to generate a space for meeting, dialogue, and exchange to share concerns and struggles, and to generate complicity among those who struggle for life in all corners of the world.

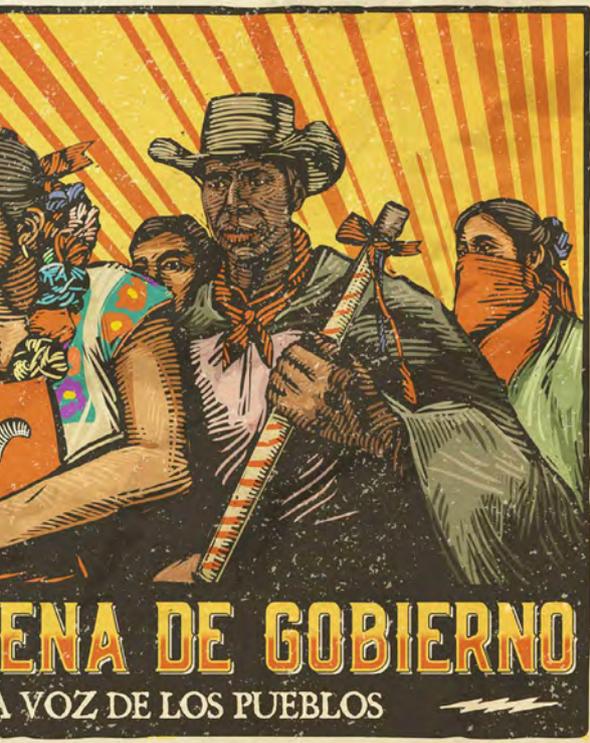
They announced:

“Just as the ongoing destruction does not recognize borders, nationalities, flags, languages, cultures, races; so the fight for humanity is everywhere, all the time.”

On 2 May, Squadron 421, composed of four women, two men, and one *otroa*, set sail from the Yucatan peninsula to Europe. From that moment on, the image of Zapatistas travelling by boat circulated as extraordinary proof of a

commitment to rethink the transformation of the world. The voyage was a journey in reverse, a counter to a history of conquest. 500 years after the arrival of the Spaniards in “America”, the Zapatistas told the world that “you didn’t conquer us. We continue to resist and rebel.” They renamed Europe as *Slumil k’ajxemk’op* (“Rebellious Land” or “Land which does not give in nor give up”) to emphasize the persistent resistance and *other* politics. These poetic and performative actions showed a possibility of disputing history and reclaiming it from our present reality.

Later, a delegation of 177 Zapatistas travelled by air, accompanied by 16 delegates from the CNI-CIG and the Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra y el Agua de Morelos, Puebla y Tlaxcala (Peoples’ Front in Defence of Land and Water of Morelos, Puebla, and Tlaxcala, FPDTA-MPT). They visited around 30 countries,



where the Zapatistas held closed-door meetings with collectives to share their experiences, sow seeds, and think together about ways to organize. In parallel, the CNI-CIG/FPDTA-MPT delegation denounced the multiple megaprojects that threaten life in their territories and shared their struggles.

As we witness the storm sweeping everything away, “*luchar por la vida*” (to struggle for life) has become the slogan, image, and music of *other* politics that seek to create a new world. This new initiative shows how Zapatismo invites us to globally challenge the times and spaces of capital as the only possibility to confront the destruction

of the world. This journey rewrote history, contested borders with political imagination, and created networks through the subversive acts of listening and speaking. At the time of writing, there are still four continents ahead in the Zapatistas’ journey, not as a means of increasing solidarity, but to give strength to anti-capitalist organization.

Illustrations

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- p. 76/77: Photograph by Inés Durán Matute.
- p. 78: Illustration by Colectivos Adherentes a la Sexta.
- p. 78/79: Illustration by Gran OM y El Dante.
- p. 79: Photograph by Enlace Zapatista.

Endnotes

- 1 For a detailed explanation of ‘otroas’, see: <https://doi.org/10.14381/783830470558-010> <https://www.hilibra.com/4e/4e/gb> - Open Access -