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The Other Face of the Earth: Social Movements against the New Global Order

Your problem is the same as many people have. It relates to the social and economic doctrine known as "neo-liberalism". This is a meta-theoretical problem. I am telling you. You start from the assumption that "neo-liberalism" is a doctrine. And by you I refer to all those with schemes as rigid and square as their head. You think that "neo-liberalism" is a capitalist doctrine to confront economic crises that capitalism charges are caused by "populism". Well, in fact "neo-classicism" is not a theory to explain crises or to confront them. It is the crisis itself, made theory and economic doctrine! This is to say that "neo-liberalism" does not have the slightest coherence, neither has plans or historical perspective. I mean, it's pure theoretical shit.

Durito, talking to Subcomandante Marcos in the Lacandon Forest, 1994¹

Globalization, Informationalization, and Social Movements²

Globalization and informationalization, enacted by networks of wealth, technology, and power, are transforming our world. They are enhancing our productive capacity, cultural creativity, and communication potential. At the same time, they are disfranchising

¹ *Durito* is a usual character in the writings of Subcomandante Marcos, the Zapatista spokesperson. He is a beetle, but a very clever one: indeed, he is Marcos' intellectual adviser. The problem is he always fears being crushed by the too numerous guerrillas around him, so he begs Marcos to keep the movement small. This text by *Durito* is cited from *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional/Subcomandante Marcos* (1995: 58-9); my translation, with *Durito's* benevolence.

² This chapter has benefited from valuable intellectual exchanges at the

societies. As institutions of state and organizations of civil society are based on culture, history, and geography, the sudden acceleration of the historical tempo, and the abstraction of power in a web of computers, are disintegrating existing mechanisms of social control and political representation. With the exception of a small elite of *globalopolitans* (half beings, half flows), people all over the world resent loss of control over their lives, over their environment, over their jobs, over their economies, over their governments, over their countries, and, ultimately, over the fate of the Earth. Thus, following an old law of social evolution, resistance confronts domination, empowerment reacts against powerlessness, and alternative projects challenge the logic embedded in the new global order, increasingly sensed as disorder by people around the planet. However, these reactions and mobilizations, as is often the case in history, come in unusual formats and proceed through unexpected ways. This chapter, and the next one, explore these ways.

To broaden the empirical scope of my inquiry, while keeping its analytical focus, I will compare three movements that explicitly oppose the new global order of the 1990s, coming from extremely different cultural, economic, and institutional contexts, through sharply contrasting ideologies: the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico; the American militia; and *Aum Shinrikyo*, a Japanese cult.

In the next chapter I will analyze the environmental movement, arguably the most comprehensive, influential movement of our time. In its own way, and through the creative cacophony of its multiple voices, environmentalism also challenges global ecological disorder, indeed the risk of eco-suicide, brought about by uncontrolled global development, and by the unleashing of unprecedented technological forces without checking their social and environmental sustainability. But its cultural and political specificity, and its character as a proactive, rather than reactive, social movement, advise a separate analytical treatment of the environmental movement, as distinct from defensive movements built around the trenches of specific identities.

Before proceeding into the heart of the matter, let me introduce three brief methodological remarks that are necessary for understanding the analyses to be presented in the following pages.³

First, *social movements* must be understood in their own terms:

International Seminar on Globalization and Social Movements organized by the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Social Movements, held at Santa Cruz, California, April 16-19, 1996. I thank the organizers of the seminar, Barbara Epstein and Louis Maheu, for their kind invitation.

³ For a theoretical discussion of social movements directly relevant to the inquiry presented here, see Castells (1983); Dalton and Kuechler (1990); Epstein (1991); Riechmann and Fernandez Buey (1994); Calderon (1995); Dubet and

namely, *they are what they say they are*. Their practices (and foremost their discursive practices) are their self-definition. This approach takes us away from the hazardous task of interpreting the "true" consciousness of movements, as if they could only exist by revealing the "real" structural contradictions. As if, in order to come to life, they would necessarily have to bear these contradictions, as they bear their weapons and brandish their flags. A different, and necessary, research operation is to establish the relationship between the movements, as defined by their practice, their values, and their discourse, and the social processes to which they seem to be associated: for example, globalization, informationalization, the crisis of representative democracy, and the dominance of symbolic politics in the space of media. In my analysis I will try to conduct both operations: the characterization of each movement, in terms of its own specific dynamics; and its interaction with the broader processes that induce its existence, and become modified by this very existence. The importance I give to the movement's discourse will be reflected in my writing. When presenting and analyzing the movements, I will follow very closely their own *words*, not just ideas, as recorded in documents on which I have worked. However, in order to spare the reader from the minute details of reference citation, I have opted for giving generic references to the materials from which the discourses have been obtained, leaving the interested reader to find in these materials the precise words reported in my writing.

Secondly, social movements may be socially conservative, socially revolutionary, or both, or none. After all, we now have concluded (I hope for ever) that there is no predetermined directionality in social evolution, that the only sense of history is the history we sense. Therefore, from an analytical perspective, there are no "bad" and "good" social movements. They are all symptoms of our societies, and all impact social structures, with variable intensities and outcomes that must be established by research. Thus, I like the *Zapatistas*, I dislike the American militia, and I am horrified by *Aum Shinrikyo*. Yet, they are all, as I will argue, meaningful signs of new social conflicts, and embryos of social resistance and, in some cases, social change. Only by scanning with an open mind the new historical landscape will we be able to find shining paths, dark abysses, and muddled breakthroughs into the new society emerging from current crises.

Thirdly, to put some order into a mass of disparate material on the social movements to be examined in this and following chapters, I

Wieviorka (1995); Maheu (1995); Melucci (1995); Touraine (1995); Touraine et al. (1996); Yazawa (forthcoming).

find it useful to categorize them in terms of Alain Touraine's classic typology that defines a social movement by three principles: the movement's *identity*, the movement's *adversary*, and the movement's vision or social model, which I call *societal goal*.⁴ In my personal adaptation (which I believe to be consistent with Touraine's theory), *identity* refers to the self-definition of the movement of what it is, on behalf of whom it speaks. *Adversary* refers to the movement's principal enemy, as explicitly identified by the movement. *Societal goal* refers to the movement's vision of the kind of social order, or social organization, it would wish to attain in the historical horizon of its collective action.

Having clarified the point of departure, let's depart for this voyage to the other face of the Earth, the one refusing globalization for the sake of capital and informationalization for the sake of technology. And where dreams of the past, and nightmares of the future, inhabit a chaotic world of passion, generosity, prejudice, fear, fantasy, violence, flawed strategies, and lucky strikes. Humanity, after all.

The three movements I have selected to understand insurgency against globalization are extremely different in their identity, in their goals, in their ideology, and in their relationship to society.⁵ This is precisely the interest of the comparison because they are similar, however, in their explicit opposition to the new global order, identified as the enemy in their discourse and in their practice. And all of them are likely to have significant impacts on their societies, directly or indirectly. The *Zapatistas* have already transformed Mexico, inducing a crisis in the corrupt politics and unjust economy prevailing in Mexico, while putting forward proposals for democratic reconstruction that are being widely debated in Mexico, and throughout the world. The American militia, the most militant component of a broader socio-political movement self-identified as *The Patriots* (or *False Patriots*, as their critics call them), has much deeper roots in American society than is usually acknowledged, and may induce unpredictable, significant outcomes in America's tense political scene, as I will argue below. *Aum Shinrikyo*, while remaining a marginal cult in Japanese society, has dominated media attention and public debate for more than a year (in 1995–96), and it has acted as a

⁴ Touraine (1965, 1966). Touraine's formulation in fact uses a slightly different terminology, in French: *principe d'identité, principe d'opposition, principe de totalité*. I decided that it would be clearer for an international audience to use more plain words to say the same thing, at the risk of losing the authentic French flavor.

⁵ This comparative analysis is based on a joint study with Shujiro Yazawa and Emma Kiselyova, conducted in 1995. For a first elaboration of this study, see Castells et al. (1996).

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symptom of unseen injuries, and unfolding dramas, behind the curtains of Japanese serenity. The point I am trying to make by bringing together these different, powerful insurgencies, is precisely the diversity of sources of resistance to the new global order. Together with the reminder that the neo-liberal illusion of the end of history is over, as historically specific societies take their revenge against their domination by global flows.

Mexico's Zapatistas: the First Informational Guerrilla Movement⁶

The Movimiento Civil Zapatista is a movement that opposes social solidarity to organized crime from the power of money and government.
 Manifiesto of Movimiento Civil Zapatista, August 1995

The novelty in Mexico's political history was the inversion of the control process against the powers that be, on the basis of alternative communication . . . The newness in Chiapas' political war was the emergence of various senders of information that interpreted events in very different ways.

The flow of public information reaching society, through the media, and through new technological means, was much greater than what conventional communication strategies could control. Marcos gave his opinion, the Church gave its opinion, and independent journalists, NGOs, and intellectuals, from the forest, from Ciudad de Mexico, from

⁶ The analysis of the *Zapatista* movement presented here is greatly indebted, as is often the case in this book, to contributions by two women. Professor Alejandra Moreno Toscano, a distinguished urban historian at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, and a former Secretary of Social Welfare of Mexico DF, was deputy to Manuel Camacho, the President's representative, during the critical period of negotiations between the Mexican government and the *Zapatistas* in the first months of 1994. She provided me with documents, opinion, and insights, and decisively helped my understanding of the overall process of Mexican politics in 1994-96. For her analysis (the most intelligent approach that I have read), see Moreno Toscano (1996). Secondly, Maria Elena Martinez Torres, one of my doctoral students at Berkeley, was a thorough observer of Chiapas peasantry. During our intellectual interaction, she provided me with her own analyses (Martinez Torres, 1994, 1996). Naturally, I bear exclusive responsibility for the interpretation, and possible mistakes, in the conclusions presented in this book. Additional sources used on the *Zapatista* movement are: Garcia de Leon (1985); Arquilla and Rondfeldt (1993); Collier and Lowery Quaratiello (1994); *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional* (1994, 1995); Trejo Delarbre (1994a, b); Collier (1995); Hernandez Navarro (1995); Nash et al. (1995); Rojas (1995); Rondfeldt (1995); Tello Diaz (1995); Woldenberg (1995).

the world's financial and political capitals, all gave their own opinion. These alternative opinions, made possible by open media, or by closed media that felt the pinch from open media, called into question forms of construction of "the truth", and induced, within the political regime as well, a variety of opinions. The view from power became fragmented.

Moreno Toscano, *Turbulencia politica*, p. 82

Mexico, the nation that generated the prototype of social revolution of the 20th century, is now the scene of a prototype transnational social network of the 21st century.

Rondfeldt, Rand Corporation, 1995

On January 1, 1994, the first day of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), about 3,000 men and women, organized in the *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional*, lightly armed, took control of the main municipalities adjacent to the Lacandon Forest, in the Southern Mexican state of Chiapas: San Cristobal de las Casas, Altamirano, Ocosingo and Las Margaritas. Most of them were Indians from various ethnic groups, although there were also *mestizos*, and some of their leaders, and particularly their spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos, were urban intellectuals. The leaders had their faces hidden behind ski masks. When the Mexican Army dispatched reinforcements, the guerrillas withdrew to the rainforest in good order. However, several dozen of them as well as civilians, and a number of soldiers and policemen, died in the confrontation or were summarily executed by soldiers in the aftermath. The impact of the uprising in Mexico, and the widespread sympathy that the *Zapatistas'* cause immediately inspired in the country, and in the world, convinced the Mexican president, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, to negotiate. On January 12, Salinas announced a unilateral ceasefire, and appointed as his "peace representative," Manuel Camacho, a respected Mexican politician, once considered his likely successor, who had just resigned from government after his presidential hopes were frustrated by Salinas (see my analysis of the Mexican political crisis in chapter 5). Manuel Camacho, and his trusted intellectual adviser, Alejandra Moreno Toscano, traveled to Chiapas, met with the influential Catholic Bishop Samuel Ruiz, and were able to engage in serious peace talks with the *Zapatistas* who quickly acknowledged the sincerity of the dialogue, although they remained justifiably wary of potential repression and/or manipulation. Camacho read to the insurgents a text in *tzotzil*, also broadcast in *tzeltal* and *chok*: the first time ever a leading Mexican official had acknowledged Indian languages. On January 27, an agreement was signed, setting a ceasefire, freeing prisoners on both sides, and

engaging a process of negotiation on a broad agenda of political reform, Indian rights, and social demands.

Who are the Zapatistas?

Who were these insurgents, unknown until then to the rest of the world, in spite of two decades of widespread peasant mobilizations in the communities of Chiapas and Oaxaca? They were peasants, most of them Indians, *tzeltales*, *tzotziles*, and *choles*, generally from the communities established since the 1940s in the Lacandon rainforest, on the Guatemalan border. These communities were created with government support in order to find a way out of the social crisis created by the expulsion of *acasillados* (landless peasants working for landowners) from the *fincas* (farms), and ranches, owned by middle and large landowners, generally *mestizos*. For centuries, Indians and peasants have been abused by colonizers, bureaucrats, and settlers. And for decades they have been kept in constant insecurity, as the status of their settlements constantly changed, in accordance with the interests of government and landowners. In 1972, President Echeverria decided to create the "bioreserve" of Montes Azul, and to return most of the forest to 66 families of the original Lacandon tribe, thus ordering the relocation of 4,000 families that had resettled in this area, after their expulsion from their original communities. Behind the Lacandon tribes and the sudden love of nature, there were the interests of the forestry company Cofolasa, supported by the government development corporation, NAFINSA, which received logging rights. Most settlers refused to relocate, and started a 20-year struggle for their right to land, which was still lingering on when Salinas assumed the Presidency in 1988. Salinas finally accepted the rights of some colonists, but restricted his generosity to those few supporting the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), the government party. In 1992, a new decree abolished the legal rights of the Indian communities that had resettled for the second time. This time the pretext was the Rio Conference on the Environment, and the need to protect the rainforest. Cattle feeding in the area was also curtailed in order to help Chiapas ranchers, competing with cattle smuggling from Guatemala. The final blow to the fragile economy of peasant communities came when Mexican liberalization policies in the 1990s, in preparation for NAFTA, ended restrictions of imports of corn, and eliminated protection on the price of coffee. The local economy, based on forestry, cattle, coffee, and corn, was dismantled. Furthermore, the status of communal land became uncertain after Salinas' reform of the historic article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which ended communal possession of agricultural property by the

villagers (*ejidos*), in favor of full commercialization of individual property, another measure directly related to Mexico's alignment with privatization in accordance with NAFTA. In 1992 and 1993, peasants mobilized peacefully against these policies. But, after their powerful march of Xi' Nich, which brought thousands of peasants from Palenque to Ciudad de Mexico, was left without answer, they changed tactics. By the middle of 1993, in most communities of Lacandon, corn was not planted, coffee was left in the bushes, children withdrew from schools, and cattle were sold to buy weapons. The headline of the insurgents' Manifesto on January 1, 1994 read: "*Hoy decimos BASTA!*" (Today, we say ENOUGH!)

These peasant communities, mostly Indian, joined by other settlements from the Los Altos area, were not alone in the social struggles they had undertaken since the early 1970s. They were supported, and to some extent organized, by the Catholic Church, under the initiative of San Cristobal de las Casas' Bishop Samuel Ruiz, somewhat associated with liberation theology. Not only did the priests support and legitimize Indian claims, but they helped to form hundreds of cadres of peasants' unions. These cadres shared membership of the Church and of the unions. There were over one hundred *tuhuneles* (aides of priests); and over one thousand catechists, who provided the backbone of the movement, which developed in the form of peasant unions, each one of them based in a community (*ejido*). Strong religious feeling among Indian peasants was reinforced by education, information, and support from the Church, leading to frequent conflicts between the local Church, on the one hand, and Chiapas ranchers and Chiapas PRI apparatus, on the other hand. Yet, while the Church was decisive in educating, organizing, and mobilizing Indian peasant communities for many years, Samuel Ruiz and his aides strongly opposed armed struggle and were not among the insurgents, contrary to accusations by Chiapas ranchers. The cadres who organized the armed insurrection came, in their majority, from the Indian communities themselves, particularly from the ranks of young men and women who had grown up in the new climate of economic distress and social struggle. Other cadres came from Maoist groups formed in urban Mexico (particularly in Ciudad de Mexico, and in Monterrey) in the 1970s, in the aftermath of the student movement of 1968 crushed in the Tlatelolco massacre. The *Fuerzas de Liberacion Nacional* seem to have been active in the area for a long time, although accounts diverge on this point. In any case, whatever the origin, it seems that, after a series of setbacks in urban areas, a few revolutionaries, men and women, undertook the long march of establishing their credibility among the most oppressed sectors of the country, through patient work and daily sharing of their hardship and

struggles. Marcos seems to have been one of these militants, coming to the region in the early 1980s, according to government sources, after completing studies in sociology and communication in Mexico and Paris, and teaching social sciences in one of the best universities in Mexico DF.⁷ He is clearly a very learned intellectual, who speaks several languages, writes well, is extraordinarily imaginative, has a wonderful sense of humor, and is at ease in his relationship with the media. These revolutionary intellectuals, because of their honesty and dedication, were welcomed by the priests and, for a long time, in spite of ideological differences, they worked together in organizing peasant communities, and in supporting their struggles. It was only after 1992, when promises of reforms continued to go unfulfilled, and when the situation in the Lacandon communities become more dire because of the overall process of economic modernization in Mexico, that *Zapatista* militants set up their own structure and initiated preparations for guerrilla warfare. In May 1993 a first skirmish with the army took place, but the Mexican government downplayed the incident to avoid problems in the ratification of NAFTA by the US Congress. It should, however, be emphasized that the leadership of the *Zapatistas* is genuinely peasant, and mainly Indian. Marcos, and other urban militants, could not act on their own.⁸ The process of deliberation, as well as negotiation with the government, consisted of lengthy procedures with the full participation of the communities. This was critical since, once a decision had been made, the whole community had to follow the common decision, to the extent that, in a few instances, villagers were expelled because of their refusal to participate in the uprising. Yet, during the two and a half years of the open insurgency process, the overwhelming majority of Lacandon communities, and a majority of Indians in Chiapas, showed their support for the insurgents, following them to the forest when the army took over their villages in February 1995.

The value structure of the *Zapatistas*: identity, adversaries, and goals

The deep causes of the rebellion are obvious. *But what are the insurgents' demands, goals, and values? How do they see themselves and how do*

⁷ The Mexican government claims to have identified Subcomandante Marcos and the main leaders of the *Zapatistas*, and its claim appears to be plausible. It has been widely reported in the media. However, since the *Zapatistas* are still insurgents at the time of writing, I do not feel it is proper to accept these claims as a matter of fact.

⁸ Moreno Toscano (1996).

they identify their enemy? On the one hand, they place themselves in historical continuity with five hundred years of struggle against colonization and oppression. Indeed, the turning point of the peasant movement was the massive demonstration in San Cristobal de las Casas on October 12, 1992, protesting the fifth centenary of the Spanish conquest of America by destroying the statue of Chiapas' conqueror, Diego de Mazariegos. On the other hand, they see the reincarnation of this oppression in the current form of the new global order: NAFTA, and the liberalizing reforms undertaken by President Salinas, which fail to include peasants and Indians in the modernization process. The changes in the historic article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which had given formal satisfaction to the demands of agrarian revolutionaries championed by Emiliano Zapata, became the symbol of the exclusion of peasant communities by the new order of free traders. To this critique, shared by the whole movement, Marcos and others added their own challenge to the new global order: the projection of the socialist revolutionary dream beyond the end of communism and the demise of guerrilla movements in Central America. As Marcos wrote with irony:

There is nothing to fight for any longer. Socialism is dead. Long life to conformism, to reform, to modernity, to capitalism and to all kind of cruel etceteras. Let's be reasonable. That nothing happens in the city, or in the countryside, that everything continues the same. Socialism is dead. Long life to capital. Radio, press, and television repeat it. Some socialists, now reasonably repentant, also repeat the same.⁹

Thus, the *Zapatistas'* opposition to the new global order is twofold: they fight against the exclusionary consequences of economic modernization; but they also challenge the inevitability of a new geopolitical order under which capitalism becomes universally accepted.

The insurgents affirmed their Indian pride, and fought for the recognition of Indian rights in the Mexican Constitution. However, it does not seem that the defense of ethnic identity was a dominant element in the movement. Indeed, the Lacandon communities have been created by forced resettlement which broke up original identities from different communities and brought them together as peasants. Furthermore, it seems that, as Collier writes,

Ethnic identity once *divided* indigenous communities from one another in the Chiapas central highlands. Recent events

⁹ EZLN (1994: 61); my translation.

underscore a transformation: now, in the wake of the Zapatista rebellion, peoples of diverse indigenous background are emphasizing what they share with one another in revindication of economic, social, and political exploitation.¹⁰

Thus, this new Indian identity was constructed through their struggle, and came to include various ethnic groups: "What is common to us is the land that gave us life and struggle."¹¹

The *Zapatistas* are not subversives, but legitimate rebels. They are *Mexican patriots*, up in arms against new forms of foreign domination by American imperialism. And they are *democrats*, appealing to article 39 of the Mexican Constitution which proclaims "the right of the people to alter or modify its form of government." Thus, they call upon Mexicans to support democracy, ending *de facto* rule of one-party government based on electoral fraud. This call, coming from Chiapas, the Mexican state with the largest vote for PRI candidates, traditionally imposed by local *caciques*, elicited a strong echo in the urban middle-class sectors of a Mexican society craving freedom, and tired of systemic corruption. That the uprising took place precisely in the year of the presidential election, and in an election that was supposed to liberalize the PRI's hold on the state, is a sign of the tactical ability of the *Zapatistas*, and it was a major factor in protecting them from outright repression. President Salinas wanted to establish his legacy as both economic modernizer and political liberalizer, not only for his place in history, but for his next job: his candidacy to become the first secretary general of the newly constituted World Trade Organization, precisely the institution articulating the new world economic order. Under these circumstances, a Harvard-educated economist could hardly launch all-out military repression against a genuine peasant, Indian movement fighting against social exclusion.

¹⁰ Collier (1995: 1); a similar argument is put forward by Martinez Torres (1994). In the Manifesto issued by the *Zapatistas* over the Internet in November 1995, to commemorate the twelfth anniversary of the founding of their organization, they strongly emphasized their character as a Mexican movement for justice and democracy, beyond the defense of Indian identity: "The country we want, we want it for all the Mexicans, and not only for the Indians. The Democracy, Liberty, and Justice we want, we want for all Mexicans, and not only for the Indians. We do not want to separate from the Mexican Nation, we want to be part of it, we want to be accepted as equal, as persons with dignity, as human beings ... Here we are brothers, the dead of always. Dying again, but now to live" (EZLN, *Comunicado* on Internet, 17 November 1995; my translation).

¹¹ *Zapatista* declaration, January 25, 1994; cited by Moreno Toscano (1996: 92).

The communication strategy of the *Zapatistas*: the Internet and the media

The success of the *Zapatistas* was largely due to their communication strategy, to the point that they can be called the *first informational guerrilla movement*. They created a media event in order to diffuse their message, while desperately trying not to be brought into a bloody war. There were, of course, real deaths, and real weapons, and Marcos, and his comrades, were ready to die. Yet, actual warfare was not their strategy. The *Zapatistas* used arms to make a statement, then parlayed the possibility of their sacrifice in front of the world media to force a negotiation and advance a number of reasonable demands which, as opinion polls seem to indicate, found widespread support in Mexican society at large.¹² Autonomous communication was a paramount objective for the *Zapatistas*:

When the bombs were falling over the mountains south of San Cristobal, when our combatants were resisting attacks from federal troops, when the air smelled with powder and blood, the "Comite Clandestino Revolucionario Indigena del EZLN" called and told me, more or less: We must say our word and be heard. If we do not do it now, others will take our voice and lies will come out from our mouth without us wanting it. Look for a way to speak our word to those who would like to listen.¹³

The *Zapatistas'* ability to communicate with the world, and with Mexican society, and to capture the imagination of people and of intellectuals, propelled a local, weak insurgent group to the forefront of world politics. In this sense Marcos was essential. He did not have organizational control of a movement that was rooted in the Indian communities, and he did not show any signs of being a great military strategist, although he was wise in ordering retreat every time the army was to engage them. But he was extraordinarily able in establishing a communication bridge with the media, through his well-constructed writings, and by his *mise-en-scène* (the mask, the pipe, the setting of the interviews), somehow serendipitously found, as in the case of the mask that played such an important role in popularizing the revolutionaries' image: all over the world, everybody could become *Zapatista* by wearing a mask. Furthermore (although this may be an

¹² According to a poll conducted on December 8 and 9, 1994, 59 percent of Mexico City residents had a "good opinion" of the *Zapatistas*, and 78 percent thought that their demands were justified (published in the newspaper *Reforma*, December 11, 1994).

¹³ Marcos, February 11, 1994; cited by Moreno Toscano (1996: 90).

over-theorization), masks are a recurrent ritual in pre-Colombian Mexican Indian cultures, so that rebellion, equalization of faces, and historical flashback played into each other in a most innovative theatrics of revolution. Essential in this strategy was the *Zapatistas'* use of telecommunications, videos, and of computer-mediated communication, both to diffuse their messages from Chiapas to the world (although probably not transmitted from the forest), and to organize a worldwide network of solidarity groups that literally encircled the repressive intentions of the Mexican government; for instance, during the army invasion of insurgent areas on February 9, 1995. It is interesting to underline that at the origins of the *Zapatistas'* use of the Internet are two developments of the 1990s: the creation of *La Neta*, an alternative computer communication network in Mexico and Chiapas; and its use by women's groups (particularly by "*De mujer a mujer*") to link up Chiapas' NGOs with other Mexican women, as well as with women's networks in the US. *La Neta*.¹⁴ originated in the link-up in 1989-93 between Mexican NGOs, supported by the Catholic Church, and the Institute for Global Communication in San Francisco, supported by skilled computer experts donating their time and expertise to good causes. In 1994, with the help of a grant from the Ford Foundation, *La Neta* was able to establish a node in Mexico with a private Internet provider. In 1993 *La Neta* had been established in Chiapas, with the purpose of getting local NGOs on line, including the Center for Human Rights "Bartolome de las Casas," and a dozen other organizations, which came to play a major role in informing the world during the *Zapatista* uprising. Extensive use of the Internet allowed the *Zapatistas* to diffuse information and their call throughout the world instantly, and to create a network of support groups which helped to produce an international public opinion movement that made it literally impossible for the Mexican government to use repression on a large scale. Images and information from and around the *Zapatistas* acted powerfully on the Mexican economy and politics. As Martinez Torres writes:

Ex-President Salinas created a "bubble economy" which for several years permitted the illusion of prosperity based on a massive inflow of speculative investments in high-interest government bonds, that via a spiraling trade deficit and debt allowed the middle and working classes to enjoy for a while a multitude of imported consumer goods. Yet, as easy as it was to lure investors

¹⁴ It seems necessary to clarify the multiple meaning of *La Neta* for non-Mexican readers. Besides being the figurative Spanish feminine of The Net, *la neta* is Mexican slang for "the real story."

in, any loss of investor confidence could potentially spiral into panic and run on Mexican bonds, with the possibility of causing a collapse of the system. In effect, the Mexican economy [in 1994] was an enormous confidence game. Since confidence is basically created by manipulation of information it can be destroyed in exactly the same way. In the new world order where information is the most valuable commodity, that same information can be much more powerful than bullets.¹⁵

This was the key to the *Zapatistas'* success. Not that they deliberately sabotaged the economy. But they were protected by their relentless media connection, and by their Internet-based worldwide alliances, from outright repression, forcing negotiation, and raising the issue of social exclusion and political corruption to the eyes and ears of world public opinion.

Indeed, experts of the Rand Corporation concur with this analysis,¹⁶ having forecasted the eventuality of *Zapatista*-type "netwars" since 1993: "The revolutionary forces of the future may consist increasingly of widespread multi-organizational networks that have no particular national identity, claim to arise from civil society, and include aggressive groups and individuals who are keenly adept at using advanced technology for communications, as well as munitions."¹⁷ The *Zapatistas* seem to have realized the worst nightmares of experts of the new global order.

The contradictory relationship between social movement and political institution

However, while the impact of the *Zapatistas'* demands shook up the Mexican political system, and even the Mexican economy, they became entangled in their own contradictory relationship to the political system. On the one hand, the *Zapatistas* called for the democratization of the political system, reinforcing similar demands being made within Mexican society. But they were never able to make precise the meaning of their political project, besides the obvious condemnation of electoral fraud. In the meantime, the PRI had been irreversibly shaken, divided into groups that were literally killing each other (see chapter 5). The presidential elections of August 1994 were reasonably clean, giving Zedillo, an obscure PRI candidate brought into the limelight by accidental circumstances, a triumph fueled by

¹⁵ Martinez Torres (1996: 5).

¹⁶ Rondfeldt (1995).

¹⁷ Arquilla and Rondfeldt (1993).

fear of the unknown. Ironically, political reforms in the election process, partly as a result of *Zapatista* pressure, contributed to the legitimacy of the election, after the agreement on January 27, 1994 between all presidential candidates. The leftist opposition party, whose leader had been rebuffed by the *Zapatistas*, suffered electorally for having sought Marcos' support. In August 1994, the *Zapatistas* called a National Democratic Convention in a site of the Lacandon Forest that they named Aguascalientes, the name of the historic site where, in 1915, revolutionary leaders (Villa, Zapata, Orozco) met to establish the Revolutionary Convention. In spite of massive participation from grassroots organizations, leftist parties, intellectuals, and media, Aguascalientes exhausted itself in the symbolism of the event, this ephemeral gathering being unable to translate the new *Zapatista* language into conventional, leftist politics. Thus, in May 1995, in the midst of protracted negotiations with the government in San Andres Larrainzar, the *Zapatistas* organized a popular consultation on the possibility of becoming a civilian political force. In spite of the obvious difficulties (they were still an insurgent organization), almost 2 million people participated in the consultation throughout Mexico, supporting the proposal in their vast majority. Thus, in January 1996, to commemorate two years of their uprising, the *Zapatistas* decided to transform themselves into a political party, seeking full participation in the political process. They also decided, however, to keep their weapons until an agreement could be reached with the government on all points of contention. In January 1996 an important agreement on a future constitutional acknowledgment of Indian rights was reached, but negotiations were in process at the time of writing (in October 1996) concerning political reform, and economic matters. A difficult issue seemed to be the claim by the Indian communities to keep ownership of their land, including of their underground resources, a demand adamantly rejected by the Mexican government since it is widely believed that Chiapas is rich in hydrocarbons underground. As for political reform, the unwillingness of the PRI to release its hold on power made agreement very difficult.

The future potential of a *Zapatista* political party is uncertain. On the one hand, Marcos remains, by the end of 1996, one of the most popular leaders in Mexico. On the other hand, much of his popularity is linked to his status as a revolutionary myth. Marcos as a compromising *politico* might lose much of his appeal, something that he seems to be aware of. Thus, he and his *companeros*, were, at the time of writing, hesitant to proceed with full institutionalization of their political standing, although this is a likely outcome of their insurgency, albeit in the context of a still uncertain transformation of the Mexican political system.

Yet, regardless of the *Zapatistas'* fate, their insurgency did change Mexico, challenging the one-sided logic of modernization, characteristic of the new global order. Acting on the powerful contradictions existing inside the PRI between modernizers and the interests of a corrupt party apparatus, the debate triggered by the *Zapatistas* helped considerably to break PRI's hold on Mexico. The Mexican economy, buoyant and euphoric in 1993, was exposed in all its weakness, prompting US critics of NAFTA to claim vindication. An absent actor in the current Latin American modernization processes, the Indian peasantry (about 10 percent of the Mexican population) suddenly came to life. A constitutional reform, in the process of approval in November 1996, acknowledged the pluri-cultural character of Mexico, and gave new rights to the Indians, including the publication of textbooks in 30 Indian languages, to be used in public schools. Health and education services improved in many Indian communities, and limited self-government was in the process of implementation.

The affirmation of Indian cultural identity, albeit in a reconstructed manner, was connected to their revolt against outrageous abuse. But their fight for dignity was decisively helped by religious affiliation expressed in the deep current of populist Catholicism in Latin America, as well as by the last stand for the Marxist left in Mexico. That this left, built on the idea of the proletariat fighting for socialism with its guns, was transformed into an Indian, peasant movement of the excluded fighting for democracy, on behalf of constitutional rights, via the Internet and the mass media, shows the depth of the transformation of liberation avenues in Latin America. It also shows that the new global order induces multiple local disorder, caused by historically rooted sources of resistance to the logic of global capital flows. Chiapas Indians fighting against NAFTA by means of their alliance with ex-Maoist militants and liberation theologians are a distinctive expression of the old search for social justice under new historical conditions.