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The Zapatista rebellion as postmodern revolution

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ABSTRACT

Many journalists describe the Zapatistas' use of media events to influence international public opinion in favour of their organization and its aim to achieve indigenous land reform as the "first postmodern revolution" (Carrigan 2001, 417). These journalists are not simply using a catch phrase, the Zapatista rebellion can be understood to be a postmodern movement in three different ways of examining the social theory: 1) as a polemic against another theory, 2) as a mode of discourse, 3) and as a guide to action (Simmons 2004). The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) stands as a postmodern polemic against modernism, and globalization. It has asserted itself as an alternative and opposing political force to the Mexican government. The postmodern mode of discourse can explain how the EZLN uses language and new technologies, over guns, to communicate their group's objectives to the repressive Mexican state authorities and to the world at large. However, postmodernism can be a poor guide to action due to its aversion to ideology. The Zapatista rebellion as postmodern revolution is an ongoing struggle and may never achieve its full objectives.

Introduction

The following Louis Althusser paraphrase applies to the Zapatista struggle in Mexico. No ideologies preside over the interaction between the intervening discourse of the EZLN and the social processes of the state. The situation in Chiapas could always remain unalterably open to interpretation. However, this fluctuating political reality is ultimately the ideal marriage between the earlier Marxist-influenced ideals of the radicals from the northeast of Mexico and the open politics of the Christian Mayans in Chiapas.

Marxist activities intervene in and thereby change the ceaseless flux of interacting class and non-class processes comprising society. The effects of Marxist interventions, aimed at ending class exploitation and achieving communist society, will depend on all the other discursive interventions and all the non-discursive social processes with which they interact. No underlying causality and no telos govern that interaction. Social history is unalterably open. Althusser's Marxism must struggle within that openness; no modernist closure is available (Bertens and Natoli 2002, 11)

Historical background of the Zapatista rebellion

It was Marxist theory, used as a radical guide to action, which first led the Zapatistas, from northeastern Mexico, into the troubled southeastern state of Chiapas, in 1984. This guerrilla group drew its inspiration from Lenin, Mao, and the romantic revolutionary, Che Guevara, as well as ideologies of Latin American left politics. They came to the Lacandon rainforest in Chiapas with ambitions to overthrow the Mexican government and to install a socialist people's republic (Carrigan 2001). They planned to inspire and lead an indigenous Mayan guerrilla force in this endeavour.

The Bishop of San Cristobal, Samuel Ruiz, had been working with the Mayan communities in Chiapas for twenty years. He instructed them in community leadership and the Christian faith. When the radicals arrived, there was a culture clash. Their charismatic leader, called Marcos, explained that becoming "indianized" involved "an adjustment between our orthodox way of seeing the world in terms of bourgeois and proletarians to the community's worldview" (Hayden 2002, 39). The community's "worldview" was certainly

influenced by Christianity and there was obvious friction between the religious Mayans and the Marxist rebels. The Church was always committed to change through an open political process. However, when cattle ranchers began to seize villagers' land and kill community leaders, the indigenous Mayans finally sought Marcos's help to form self-defence units. The Zapatistas managed to recruit many Mayan leaders and Zapatista leadership shifted to a collective indigenous civilian group called the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee (CCRI) whose members obey the decisions of the villagers. The EZLN adopted their dual agenda: regional indigenous demands on the one hand, and the national objectives of democracy, justice, and liberty in a pluralistic multiethnic society on the other (Carrigan 2001).

In 1989, Mexican President Salinas declared that the essential condition for achieving the modernization of Chiapas was the "direct participation of the peasants as protagonists of their own reality" (Carrigan 2001, 429). However, in 1991, he abolished the traditional system of land tenure fought for in the Mexican Revolution in order to qualify for NAFTA. In 1992, he abolished the *Ejido* Law, a traditional indigenous system of reclaiming private land for community use, in order to clear the way for privatization of land and foreign cash crops for export, violating Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917.

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The Zapatista rebellion as postmodern polemic

Postmodernism is a polemic against the modern movement that was born in Western Europe over five hundred years ago when Spain, France, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and other powerful nations crossed the Atlantic Ocean to colonize the Americas. The European colonists now rule the Americas and have a great influence on world affairs. The modern idea of progress no longer seems fit for today's reality, where the environment, local cultures, and other precious resources are menaced by modernism's latest imperialist manifestation: globalization. In his book,

Postmodernism Is Not What You Think, Charles Lemert is pessimistic about the world conditions produced by the latest modern trajectory of globalization: "The modern world promised economic progress, social equality, freedom from want, and peace. In the lack of which, people today rightly wonder why they face so much poverty, inequality, hunger and disease, civil strife" (Lemert 1997, 4).

Herbert Bellinghausen, an expert on the Zapatista uprising, explains that "the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall and demise of the Soviet Union, and the globalization offensive, have all radically changed world politics and transformed the structures of power" (Hayden 2002, 138). The world lacks the central superpower that it always had in the modern, colony-based world economy. A group of North American and European states and a few other superpowers, greatly influenced by the financial market, now administer the world economy (Lemert 1997). Marcos agrees that forces outside the leading political parties are guiding the destiny of the world's leading superpowers, including the United States. Marcos states that the financial markets, and so-called free trade agreements like NAFTA, create these forces (Ramonet 2001).

Marcos describes globalization, and the forces that resist it, as the Fourth World War. (He describes the Cold War as the Third World War.) International administrative councils like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) now run the world. Nation states defend the interests and values of these administrative councils over the rights of their citizens. Neo-Liberalism, according to Marcos, embodies the vision of globalization in its philosophy, ideology, and theory (Ramonet 2001). Neoliberalism introduced the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as a political expression of modernization and of these international administrative councils. NAFTA allows multinational corporations to trade across international borders free of charge and exploit the marginalized workforce and abundant natural resources of the Chiapas

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state. The EZLN immediately recognized the oppressive consequences of such a treaty (Ramonet 2001). The Chiapas rebellion erupted the very same day NAFTA was put into effect on January 1, 1994. The EZLN moved in and occupied several indigenous communities in Chiapas, not to take political power or to impose their own program, but to create a democratic space where diverse political points of view can be resolved. The spectacle garnered international press as a polemic against the modernization program.

When the EZLN revolted with the native population and received international media attention, the Mexican government used spin to present the indigenous population as the cannon fodder of the cynical and radical Marxist guerrillas. However, the grassroots activists had awakened Mexico from its "long and lazy dream that modernity imposes on everyone and everything" (Carrigan 2001, 430). The local conflict in Chiapas was driven by forces against globalization and ignited national debate over agrarian policies, indigenous rights, Mexican racism and democracy. More importantly, the revolts gave the Mayan community a voice. They expressed the significance of the land to the deepest fibres of their tradition. Their land is part of their identity and culture; if the financial markets buy and sell the land, they endanger a valuable part of Mayan culture. Their message was clear: their traditional culture can no longer be ignored as the country moves forward (Carrigan 2001). Marcos echoes the cry of his indigenous allies: he is not ready to become something that the corporations of the world say that he should be. He does not want the social values by which he lives to be determined by the purchase and production power of international markets (Ramonet 2001).

Marcos is fighting for the right to stand freely against the hegemony and cultural homogenization brought about by globalization. Marcos believes that the law of markets rules governments, the media, education, and even the family. He maintains that individuals only have a place if they can

produce and buy. At the First Intercontinental *Encuentro* for Humanity against Neoliberalism, he proclaimed on behalf of the indigenous people of Chiapas in his opening remarks:

For the powers that be, known internationally by the term "neoliberalism,"

We did not count,

We did not produce,

We did not buy,

We did not sell.

We were cipher in the account of big capital.

(Ponce de Leon 2001, 11)

Globalization requires the elimination of indigenous people because they show no offer and no prospect of profits. They cannot advance globalization, cannot be integrated, and pose a problem through their rebellion (Hayden 2002). Lemert suggests, "Culture is culture and even culture has more to do with the struggle to survive than with the idealization of the most modern human ideals" (Lemert 1997). In the present day, the great machine of modernization has to contend, once again, with local cultures, like the Mayans, because in essence it is the local struggle to survive that makes us human, not collective ideals. Modernity's claim to be the universal culture of human progress lacks the global legitimacy that it was once granted. Lemert suggests that "[postmodernism] disapproves of modernism's uncritical assumption that European culture is an authentic, self-evident, and true universal culture in which all the world's people ought to believe. Postmodernism is a culture that prefers to break things up, to respect the several parts of social world. When it speaks of culture, it prefers to speak of cultures" (Lemert 1997, 22). That is the reason why the indigenous struggle in a remote rainforest in Mexico appeals to humanity and draws international support.

In March 2001, on the eve of the inauguration of Mexico's new president, Vicente Fox, the Subcommander Marcos marched into Mexico City with 23 other EZLN commanders and sympathizers from around the world. The

election of Fox represented much more to the Mexican people than one party's victory. Marcos and the EZLN wanted to make the point clear that the election of President Fox represented the people of Mexico's rejection of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) who had been in power for 71 years. For all these decades, the PRI was protecting the interests of modernization from Euro-American privilege to Neo-Liberalism. By combining the hype of the election victory with the hype of their march into Mexico City, the Zapatistas' aim was to represent the election result as a polemic against modernity in the minds of the nation and the world and finally give a voice to the silent and repressed social sectors (Hayden 2002). Through the march, Marcos also gave the new government legitimacy that he never gave the previous one. Marcos did ask the new government for three small signs of goodwill: the release of all Zapatista prisoners, the withdrawal of the Mexican army from seven strategic positions in Chiapas, and the ratification of the 1996 San Andres Accords on the rights of indigenous people. Fox stated that he could solve the Zapatista problem "in 15 minutes" and he refused to treat the march as an affront to the modern status quo. He maintained that Mexican democracy must "show that it is flexible enough to absorb different forms of thinking, even the most radical" (Hayden 2002, 135). He also spoke out in support of indigenous people: "Enough of ignoring indigenous people, and failing to integrate the poor and the marginalized!" Marcos saw Fox's enthusiasm as an appropriation of the Zapatista march and a false declaration of peace because Fox had not completely fulfilled the three signs of goodwill. Marcos accused Fox of staging a "simulation of peace" before peace negotiations had restarted (Klein 2002).

Chiapas is a state rich in natural resources, with the country's biggest oil and gas reserves and supplies, as well as 40% of its hydroelectricity. The Fox government may well have not wanted to release the Zapatista prisoners or withdraw military troops in order to protect the interests of NAFTA and of

modern development in Chiapas because they are invested in this idea of progress. This modern development takes place in a state where 50% of the indigenous population are illiterate, where one third of its children have no schooling, and where mortality rates are 40% higher than in the rest of the country (Hayden 2002).

Marcos wants a dialogue that will include the indigenous people in the reconstruction of Chiapas. The EZLN does not want to fragment Mexico into a multitude of small Mayan nations. Instead, it simply wants Mexican Congress to acknowledge the autonomous rights of indigenous people and to legitimize indigenous forms of organizations (Ramonet 2001). Marcos believes that to be happy is to see clearly and to fight. He wants every social sector to have the right to stand freely and indefinitely as a polemic against modern intrusions that jeopardize local cultures and differences (Ramonet 2001).

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The Zapatista rebellion as postmodern mode of discourse

Today's "mediated culture" (Lemert 1997, 28) is a semiotic and linguistic production; therefore, it must be "deconstructed" to discover underlying meaning. The author is no longer the sole messenger of meaning. This position signals the loss of the master narrative in Western culture and produces a crisis often called the "death of the subject" (McQuarrie 1995). Marcos suggests that the Zapatista movement gives force to his writings. If the EZLN were to become a political party, he believes that he would become demystified as a mythical leader, the literary quality of his work will lose its impact, and his social criticisms reinterpreted as unjust. Marcos is a man who came to power by confronting political uncertainty, by learning to follow (Klein 2002). He says that groups who win power by using weapons are poor in ideas. They should never govern because they risk governing through weapons and force. Instead, Marcos wants to forge the consciousness of the EZLN into the culture of a nation so that he can then

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remove himself and the EZLN from the equation. Marcos does invite his readers to use deconstruction methods to “reconstrue” their mediated culture. Through an analysis of the context of the author and the forces that drive their activities, the readers can uncover the underlying meaning of his author’s message (Lemert 1997). He claims that the EZLN is fighting so that they no longer have to remain clandestine and carry weapons to reclaim democracy. “We are fighting to disappear”, says Marcos (Ramonet 2001). Once the EZLN achieves its objectives, Marcos no longer has to take on the role of conscience for the organization. As a subject of the Zapatista movement, Marcos, in essence, can “die”.

In *The End of Sociological Theory: The Postmodern Hope*, Steven Seidman writes: “Just as individuals are not simply instances of the abstraction ‘humanity’, we are not embodiments of the abstractions of woman or man.” (McQuarie 1995, 414) This statement is a rejection of the master narrative, metaphysical theory, and the concept of a collective identity for “man” and “woman”. Seidman explains that there is no reason to expect a southern heterosexual Methodist woman to share a common gender experience with a northern working-class Jewish lesbian. These women certainly experience a different reality than Dona Juanita, a young Mayan woman chronicled in the book *Our Word Is Our Weapon*, the day she cried, “Ya Basta!” (Enough is enough!). She saw the Zapatista rebellion as a mirror of her personal rebellion, of her hope. She joined the Zapatistas and gave up her place in “civil society” to stand for democracy, liberty, and justice and for that complex dream: “Everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves.” Marcos explains that if there is to be a tomorrow, it will be made by the women, above all (Ponce de Leon 2001). Dona was not able to find expression in the bureaucratic, one-dimensional language of the modernist PRI, seeking domination and liberation, universal values and standard justifications. Zapatismo, Zapatista social thought, as a mode of discourse, offered

alternative images and symbolic cultural resources that Dona can draw on to define herself. Marcos’s book, *Our Word Is Our Weapon*, offers stories about society that carry moral, social, ideological, and political significance like the story of Dona Juanita. It respects multiple identities, local heterogeneous struggles, and a multifaceted experience of empowerment (McQuarie 1995). Identity politics and the politics of difference have increasingly taken centre stage in the political dialogue of Western society. This is evident in the continual effort of politicians to use political correctness in language to express these differences clearly, while assuring not to assume what is obvious and risk alluding to the “zero signifier”, the white European man (Lemert 1997).

Marcos places the indigenous people in the “center” of his message to the world and he avoids modern language such as “nation”, “humanity”, and “inalienable rights” that derive from the centre of modern culture. Charles Lemert states: “Today the talk is about what we will do without a Center, even the Center so many had, with good reason, grown to hate. If there is a dawning postmodern world, it might well be one that transcends the older cultural logic, one in which there is no zero signifier. To some this is a terrifying prospect. To others it is a great relief, however frightening” (Lemert 1997, 100). Marcos and the Zapatistas are fighting for this world. They seek a world where they do not have to struggle from the centre of the European colonial nation state. They want to stand up and speak from their own centre for local cultural rights with the democratic support of other autonomous social sectors without instigating opposition from a central state authority.

In her book, *Fences and Windows*, author Naomi Klein claims that “the Zapatistas’ best weapon is the Internet but their secret weapon is their language. In *Our Word Is Our Weapon*, we read manifestos and war cries that are also poems, legends and riffs” (Klein 2002, 212-213). To Jean-François

Lyotard, language games are a postmodern approach to knowledge, proposing that we conceive of various discourses as types of games with their own rules, structure, and moves (Ritzer 1990). Subcommander Marcos is a leader who does not show his face and preaches in riddles, not in certainties. Zapatismo, according to Marcos, is not a doctrine with a manifesto but an intuition expressed through riffs and language games. Zapatismo is intellectual guerrilla warfare (Klein 2002).

Unlike other revolutionaries, Marcos has spread the Zapatista word through narrative knowledge: pragmatic language games that include long silences and riddles like “a world with many worlds in it” and “people who must hide their faces to be seen”. These phrases have a way of burrowing into social consciousness, disseminating around the world, and replicating until they take on a quality of truth. In postmodern science, narrative knowledge, as opposed to scientific knowledge, includes ordinary knowledge structures like language and symbols but also myth, folklore and ideology (McQuarrie 1995). In his article, “Postmodern Social Theory”, Norman Denzin explains “[Narrative knowledge] is the raw material for the social bond. It is played out in language games which are agnostically structured. Narrative knowledge carries its own authority. It absorbs the past into the present” (McQuarrie 1995, 400).

In the language games of narrative knowledge, another “truth” will soon undermine the current “truth”. Lyotard does not feel that dialogue can produce consensus. Rules for language games are determined but can never achieve consensus or an end; language games produce a state in continuous discussion (Ritzer 1990). So far the Zapatistas have released six “Declarations of the Selva Lacandona” including sections entitled “What We Are” and “Where We Are Now”. Each one of these declarations is a re-evaluation of the EZLN as an organization in the narrative knowledge construction and reconstruction of the

organizational message. The “6th Declaration of the Selva Lacandona” is entitled “What we intend to do now” and ends with the statement “(to be continued...)” (Ritzer 1990; EZLN 2005).

Mexican poet and essayist, Octavio Paz, describes the televised 1994 Zapatista insurrection in Chiapas as a curious spectacle combining religious liturgy with civic ceremony. The “live” broadcast did present the historical deed “but staged and with makeup” (Hayden 2002, 30). The social impact of the insurrection is questionable because of the very nature of the media and the punchy way that it presents images on the evening news. It is hard to determine whether society really retained the historical significance of such an insurrection after the media diffused it. French philosopher, Jean Baudrillard, explains that no event is historic today because change is so rapid and intense that the event cannot make an impact and society is so saturated with information that it cannot absorb any meaning (Ritzer 1990). Naomi Klein explains that in these “information-numb times, we are beyond being awakened by a startling image, a sharp juxtaposition or even a fabulously clever détournement” (Klein 2000, 296). Paz explains that politics borders on religion and theatre, symbols are a central element in these rites. The news and ‘image over reality’ sets apart our era from the preceding ones, time loses continuity and consistency to the benefit of instantaneous sensation. News creates an objective reality that is out of reach. The little spilt blood and much flowing ink, surrounding the Zapatistas, provoke an invincible public yawn. However, the EZLN has mastered the art of public relations in maintaining the public interest. Paz describes the discussions in the Cathedral of San Cristobal in March 1994, as a “hallucinatory museum of wax figures.” American sociologist, Todd Gitlin, describes the television audience’s “visceral pleasure at the disorientation that results from a sequence of bursts, pleasure at immersion in a wild procession of fragments, the sort of pleasure that [...] has come to be known as

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'postmodern'" (Gitlin 2001, 94). The Zapatistas dressed for the camera with black and blue knit masks, coloured neck scarves, and the use of symbols like the national flag and religious images. The camera operators played for the audience with close-ups and longer views (Hayden 2002). The Zapatista soldiers in their self-conscious state "stood motionless, like medieval statues, lit by shafts of light falling from a great height to pierce the dark, cavernous spaces of the vast cathedral" (Carrigan, 2001, 432). Marcos dominated the scene facing rows upon rows of television cameras, several hundred members of the international press corps eagerly waiting to learn of the progress of the talks (Carrigan 2001). Marcos explains his message to the world television audience: he is not a leader but his "black mask is a mirror, reflecting each of their own struggles; that a Zapatista is anyone anywhere fighting injustice, that 'We are you'" (Klein 2002).

Baudrillard believes that today's society is defined by the power of the "simulacrum"; the power of images and signs that represent the commodities that are exceedingly precious to late-capitalist society. The individual has become a consumer and she has turned away from activism and toward a fascination with the "spectacle" determined by experts in the media (McQuarie 1995). Baudrillard states that information is the central commodity of today's society and that the mass media manipulates this information in the political and economic realm, to create the illusion of an abstract, universal public opinion. Mediated culture produces signs for consumption. People consume signs more than they consume the objects that the signs represent. In "hyperreality", the object is a myth and "circulates in a political economy of signs" (Ritzer 1990, 397) governed by sign value.

The local struggle in Chiapas has become an international struggle for human rights largely because of the power of "televsual" media, such as television and the internet. The media disseminates information widely and rapidly around the world, creating a sense of solidarity with other struggling minorities

(Ramonet 2001). The Zapatistas, through their semiotic politics, staged an insurrection open to people, around the world, who consider themselves outsiders. Their objective is to present, through a new discourse of words and discursive media, the stories of the indigenous people of Chiapas (Lemert 1997). They invite the international community to "watch over and regulate our battles." Joel Simon, who interviewed Marcos in September 1994, writes, "Every possible story written about Marcos and the Zapatistas raises the political cost of a Mexican army assault on the ragtag rebels. Good press - in Mexico and the US - is the Zapatistas' strongest defense" (Hayden 2002, 47). Marcos writes letters to people that he feels will sympathize with his cause including famous people, retired people, and the disabled. The EZLN has launched a "netwar" involving network forms of organization, doctrine, strategy, and technology. At the same time, Zapatista has become a brand name and a cottage industry producing T-shirts, baseball hats, and posters (Klein 2002). Consumers around the world now sport the Zapatista name and promote it as a universally accepted icon. Ironically, these supporters pay dividends to the very global market that the EZLN is fighting.

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The Zapatista rebellion as postmodern guide to action

In the *Socialist Review*, Barbara Epstein argues against postmodernists who use the word *radical* to describe their movement, such as Charles Lemert who uses the concept of *radical postmodernism*. She says that these postmodernists are unduly associating themselves with radical social movements, because they do not refer to the social goals of these movements or offer a particular critique of the existing social order, or any concept of what would be better. Instead, she argues, postmodernists use the word *radical* in a different sense, as a discursive polemic against the accepted paradigm of modernity, and its ability to unsettle or shock its audience (Epstein 1995). Epstein feels that postmodernists do not

address or even acknowledge this distinction in the sense of the word *radical*. However, Charles Lemert does make a clear distinction between the *radical postmodernist* and the radical ambitions of the *strategic postmodernist*. The radical postmodernist behaves as though modernity is already dead and their focus is on social change in the existing postmodern social order. The strategic postmodernist differs from the radical postmodernist in the way that they wage war on totality. The strategic postmodernist seeks to reconstruct modernity to expose its deceptions from within. The strategic postmodernist is a critical theorist who takes a modest approach toward a polemic and discursive critique of modern society (Lemert 1997).

Marcos insists that the Zapatistas are not radical postmodernists in the sense that their social goal is not radical social change, such as revolution. He becomes irate when people refer to him as a radical guerrilla.

What other guerrilla force has convened a national democratic movement, civic and peaceful, so that armed struggle becomes useless? What other guerrilla force has struggled to achieve a democratic space and not taken power?

What other guerrilla force has relied more on words than on bullets? (Klein 2002, 214)

The Zapatistas are radical in the sense that they want progressive social change, within the framework of strategic postmodernism. They want to break away from the accepted political paradigm of modernity but work within the existing modern structure of society.

Marcos explains that neo-liberalism would like to push minorities into the corners of the world. "But surprise, the world is round" he states, "and there are no corners" (Ramonet 2001, 60). It is clear that Marcos feels that no one can stand outside of dominant modernist structure, minority groups must subsist in the

same structure. His radical actions are meaningful as strategic reactions to modern developments in order to represent minority struggles. The EZLN chose to move in and occupy municipalities in Chiapas the very same day that NAFTA was put into effect. The EZLN march into Mexico City, on the day of the presidential inauguration of Vicente Fox, was "a stroke of genius" according to one interviewer who maintains that the government will now have to work on terms set by Marcos (Hayden 2002). Marcos can more accurately be described as a strategic postmodernist. "[Strategic postmodernists] are far less inclined to take for granted that the world has yet changed"(Lemert 1997, 44). They are more inclined to rethink and rewrite modernity than to imagine a new world.

Marcos claims that radical actions such as the 1999 Seattle street protests against the World Trade Organization had a significant impact with the media. This radical postmodernist action proved a strong will to transcend the modern, but it was far less of a reflective and complete stance against globalization than the participatory budget meeting held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989. The goal of this meeting was to allow the population to participate in municipal politics. All social sectors (unions, students, farmers, etc.) met to discuss specific themes (education, health, housing, etc.) to develop a global vision for the city. The social sectors and themes were presented to the Planning Cabinet, in order of priority. The Cabinet then included the participatory budget into the municipal budget and presented it to the municipal chamber. The population could then evaluate the local government based on its adherence to the original vision of the participatory budget meeting (Ramonet 2001). Seven years later, Marcos emulated this social participation, at the national level, with the San Andres Accords. He believes that this meeting in Porto Alegre was very valuable in the fight against globalization, because it proposed small and reasonable alternatives to adjust the current of modernization. Street protests, and radical postmodernist actions, simply say no to modernity and try to will it out of existence

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but to no avail (Ramonet 2001).

In his efforts to rethink and rewrite modernity, Marcos also strongly supports the use of the Tobin tax, named after the Nobel Prize winning economist who conceived of it. The Tobin tax is a suggested tax on all trade of currency across borders. This is supposed to put a penalty on short-term speculation in currencies. Ignacio Ramonet, of *Le Monde diplomatique*, proposed an initiative to create an organization called ATTAC (Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions to Aid Citizens) to introduce this tax (Ramonet 1997). The Tobin Tax would affect every transaction made on the stock exchange at the rate of 0.1%. If unions, social, cultural, and ecological groups pressured governments to implement the Tobin Tax, the revenue could resolve many of the world's economic, social, cultural, and ecological problems. The Tobin Tax could also attack the contemporary nucleus of power and corruption: the financial markets (Ramonet 1997).

No postmodern theorist has adequately described what is involved in a break between the modern and postmodern era while specifying the continuities between the previous era and the new one. Douglas Kellner, of the University of Texas, suggests pointing to 'residual' traditional culture and the 'emergent' postmodern breaks in recent history, as well as the 'dominant' continuity of modernity. Thus postmodernity is an emergent tendency within a dominant modernity haunted by traditional culture. We could be in a transitional space, or borderline, between the modern and postmodern. However, the postmodern break can be exaggerated to the point that we forget the ongoing significance of older ideologies such as capitalism, patriarchy, and Marxism (Ritzer 1990).

Epstein uses Marxist standards for determining whether postmodernism is a good guide to radical social change. According to Epstein, a social theory should help us understand the dynamics of power and

inequality to help us create a more egalitarian and humane social order (Epstein 1995). Michel Foucault's view of power as dispersed throughout society intersects with postmodernist feminists' belief that there is no single definition for the term "woman" because there are too many different kinds of women. Therefore, power is fragmented within the feminist doctrine and a coherent, humane, and egalitarian social order becomes difficult, if not impossible. A social theory, according to Epstein, should also provide a basis for criticizing values to help us put forth a more just and humane set of values. Epstein argues that the postmodern critique of rational and coherent subjectivity as a site of possible control can be interpreted as an endorsement of irrationality and incoherence, which do not present a good basis for criticizing values. In addition, it is impossible to put forth new values without some rational and coherent subjectivity based on the sound judgment of an individual or group (Epstein 1995). However, postmodernism's use of aesthetic standards and its focus on the discursive does not discourage attention to social reality because language is the central structure of social reality. The language games and the mode of discourse are the needle and thread used to sew the social fabric, the base of Zapatista organization (McQuarie 1995).

Foucault explains that contemporary power relations is due in large part to the growth of technological capabilities and their effect on economic production, social regulation, and communication. As a result, power relations should involve political considerations, because political discourse and practices affect our consciousness of ourselves. Foucault asks how are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge who exercise and submit to power relations as moral subjects of our own actions? Self-consciousness is inherent to postmodern theory where there are no preformed norms or universal verities (Bertens and Natoli 2002).

Marcos represents an organization that does

not compartmentalize the community through division of labour, but seeks to organize communities as a whole, creating social movements across sectors and generations (Klein 2002). Marcos's outline for a successful indigenous community, together with an egalitarian and humane social order, are outlined in the six "Declarations of the Selva Lacandona" and in the San Andres Accords that were written in collaboration with the Mexican government through rigorous negotiation and debate. In 1996, the Mexican government and the Zapatistas signed the San Andres Accords that gave indigenous people of Chiapas autonomy, or control over their communities. However, the government has yet to implement what it had signed and instead pursued an oppressive political and military strategy targeting civilians, journalists, and human rights activists. The San Andres Accords remain a set of latent rules for the ongoing discourse of indigenous rights without an end or consensus in place (Welton and Wolf 2001).

Marcos, with good reason, does not trust the Mexican government. He feels that democracy, liberty, and justice can only thrive in autonomous spaces that include a "non-hierarchical decision making, decentralized organizing and deep community democracy". Autonomous zones, born of reclaimed land, will create counter-powers to the state while remaining open to change at the community level (Klein 2002). The EZLN itself is a non-hierarchical and decentralized organization. Ideology does not drive the EZLN. Zapatismo, an intuitive sense of what is right, drives the EZLN. They feel that any form of ideology, including Marxism, is obnoxious and totalitarian in nature and they do not abide by any ideology for this reason.

Conclusion

As a polemic, postmodernism can break away from the continuity with modernity. As a mode of discourse, postmodernism can reinterpret our mediated culture and influence public opinion and provide the greatest possible resource for change. As a guide to action, postmodernism can provide the

medium for change but not necessarily the message for change because of its inherent aversion to ideology. Traditional cultures, such as the Mayan culture, will haunt emerging postmodern organizations and it is important to carve a niche for these cultures. It is also important to acknowledge the ongoing significance of older modernist ideologies, such as Marxism. Furthermore, Marxism is a part of Zapatista tradition and can very well continue to influence the organization. As a postmodern organization, the Zapatistas will never find the closure of a Marxist revolution and a communist state. The Zapatistas appreciate the futility of a reigning ideology. They do not want to replace the Mexican state authority. They affect change where they can, in the media. They believe that social sectors should be able to live in autonomous zones with their own message: their own myths, legends, and riffs. These autonomous zones will remain open to change at the community level and they will continue to push for recognition at the national level. The message of the EZLN, if there is one, is difficult to grasp because they are asking for change in public opinion and policy through the media. In the postmodern world, media is the intermediary in our group struggles. No political ideology will determine an end to our struggles in life; instead, public opinion will guide the future of our struggles with life. Perhaps, this is the underlying message of the EZLN.

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