

Historical Overview

“And you, what is your name?” I asked him.

“Nebuchadnezzar,” he said, and continued, “but my friends call me Durito.”

I thanked him for the courtesy and asked him what it was that he was studying.

“I’m studying neoliberalism and its strategy of domination for Latin America,” he told me.

“And what *good* is that to a beetle?” I asked him.

And he replied, very annoyed, “What good is it?! I have to know how long your struggle is going to last, and whether or not you are going to win. Besides, a beetle should care enough to study the situation of the world in which it lives, don’t you think, Captain?”

Don Durito of the Lacandon Jungle — a knight-errant beetle from the Southern Mexican state of Chiapas — first became known to the world in the spring of 1994 through the writings of Subcomandante Marcos, a spokesperson for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, or EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional). The EZLN itself emerged suddenly into public view on January 1st of that year when, as the armed wing of an indigenous uprising, it took over several towns and declared war on the Mexican government (**First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle**).

Durito’s Appearance in a Turbulent Year

When the Zapatista rebellion broke out, the Mexican government responded violently with some 15,000 troops, torture, summary executions, and general repression. But as EZLN communiqués carrying the Zapatista message reached the world and observer reports of state brutality multiplied, hundreds of thousands of people in Mexico and other countries rallied to the Zapatista cause, demanding that the government negotiate with the just demands of the rebels instead of responding with brutal force. As a result, the government was forced to declare a ceasefire, to pull back the troops and enter into negotiations.

The first negotiations began on February 21, 1994 and were held in the Catholic cathedral in San Cristóbal de las Casas, the old colonial capital of the state and a contemporary tourist center. Bishop Samuel Ruiz García of the diocese of San Cristóbal mediated negotiations between the ski-masked Zapatistas and government bureaucrats—a process that quickly became a media event with daily coverage by independent Mexican and foreign press correspondents. When the government finally came up with a proposal that addressed the rebels’ demands, the Zapatistas returned to their communities to discuss the government’s offer. It was during this period that Marcos first presented Durito to the world.

In a letter to Mariana, a young girl who wrote to him shortly after the onset of the rebellion, Marcos related how one day he discovered a beetle making off with his bag of tobacco. Angry about the military invasion and the threat of so many soldiers' boots to such small creatures as himself, the beetle told Marcos that he was "studying neoliberalism and its strategy of domination for Latin America" in order to discover how long the Zapatista, and by extension his own, struggle would last. In a parody of left-wing methodology, he explained that "Many things have to be taken into account: the objective conditions, the ripeness of the subjective conditions, the correlation of forces, the crisis of imperialism, the crisis of socialism, etcetera, etcetera." Although he introduced himself as Nebuchadnezzar, in a gesture of friendship he allowed Marcos to call him by his nom de guerre: Durito. Although the meeting was friendly and Durito invited Marcos to come and chat at any time, it would be almost a year before they would meet again. (**The Story of Durito and Neoliberalism**)

The course of that first year of the rebellion was a turbulent one. Although the ceasefire held throughout the year, Mexican political life was profoundly affected by the Zapatista uprising. The rebellion itself demonstrated to the world the profound poverty and desperation that was common in Mexico. The widespread mobilization of grassroots support within Mexico for the Zapatista demands of Justice, Equality and Democracy revealed the existence of equally widespread dissatisfaction with the Mexican political system.

For almost 50 years Mexico had been ruled by a single political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional). The PRI had ruled as a virtual dictatorship through the careful wielding of both the velvet glove (buying off opponents) and the mailed fist (striking down those too expensive or impossible to buy). The year 1994 would have been a year of tension in Mexico even without the Zapatista uprising because it was the sixth and final year of the presidential term of Carlos Salinas de Gortari and new elections were scheduled for August. Salinas had come to office during the last national election in 1988 through electoral fraud. Popular resentment of that fraud and subsequent repression by the government fed the continued growth of opposition parties: especially on the "Left" with the Party of the Democratic Revolution, or PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática), and on the "Right" the National Action Party, or PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional). Attacked from all sides, internal conflicts over how to deal with these challenges began to tear the PRI apart. A series of shocking assassinations wiped out several of its main figures, including Salinas' handpicked presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio who had to be replaced by a substitute candidate: Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León.

Within this volatile context, the EZLN and the Zapatista communities from which it emerged had considerable leverage to pursue their demands. After many weeks of discussing the government proposals that came out of the negotiations in San Cristóbal, the communities rejected them and continued their mobiliza-

tion. When the leadership of the PRD came to Chiapas to attempt to draw the Zapatistas into party politics, they refused.

In what would prove to be the first of a series of innovative, non-violent, political moves that would capture popular imaginations and catch both government and professional politicians off guard, the Zapatistas issued the Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle calling on Mexican civil society—by which they meant grassroots movements for change—to gather in Chiapas prior to the national elections in a National Democratic Convention, or CND (Convención Nacional Democrática). The CND was proposed as a space where all those truly interested in serious political change could gather to discuss strategies for achieving democracy and justice in Mexico. This unprecedented national gathering was held in the remote Zapatista community of Guadalupe Tepeyac in a vast meeting site carved from the jungle. They called it “Aguascalientes” after the place where Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa and Venustiano Carranza met during the Mexican Revolution to discuss the formation of a new government. From August 5-9, 1994 over 6,000 representatives of grassroots groups, independent intellectuals and even foreign supporters participated in a unique and provocative democratic “encounter”—observed and reported by a considerable contingent of reporters whose attentions were diverted from the spectacle of formal electoral politics. Although not immediately recognized by either reporters or many participants, this Zapatista “encounter” was new, not only in being the first such national gathering of the pro-democracy movement, but in being structured as a space of discussion and exchange of experience rather than as a meeting designed to reach a consensus or pass a resolution.

At that encounter, the Zapatistas met directly with the civil society that had mobilized in their defense. They explained themselves and their demands, paraded their troops—a few with automatic weapons, many more with carved wooden sticks—and called for the generalization of their own rebellion in whatever forms the diverse groups represented found appropriate to their own situations. The political success of this gathering bolstered the Zapatista communities still threatened by the presence of thousands of government troops, inspired activists in their support of the Zapatistas and became a model for even broader encounters.

In August of 1994, despite the presence of thousands of observers trying to keep the elections clean, the PRI once again not only retained the presidency but stole dozens of local elections, including the state elections in Chiapas. The response was widespread protest, but in Chiapas the protests went further than elsewhere. The editor of the newspaper *El Tiempo*, Amado Avendaño, had run for governor on the PRD ticket, and his supporters created a Revolutionary Government of Transition parallel to the official PRI-controlled state government. This creation of an autonomous institution of self-government intensified the democratic movement in Chiapas and would later prove to have been a forerunner of the formation of autonomous Zapatista municipalities.

Salinas' successor, Ernesto Zedillo, inherited not only the Zapatista rebellion and an increasingly unmanageable pro-democracy movement but also an untenable economic situation. Throughout 1994, under pressure from nervous foreign investors to hold the international value of the peso constant, the Salinas government had been secretly running down its reserves of foreign exchange. Informed again and again by his economic advisors that a devaluation of the peso was unavoidable, Salinas had refused, seeking to maintain the illusion of economic stability, and with it his chances to be appointed the first head of the new World Trade Organization by his U.S. patrons.¹

Therefore, one of the first acts of the new Zedillo administration had to be some devaluation of the peso. The efforts of Zedillo's team to bring about a slight downward adjustment in its value, however, were dramatically undermined by angry foreign investors and the Zapatistas. Just as news of the devaluation was being released, the Zapatistas announced that they had broken out of military encirclement and taken action in over 30 surrounding communities. Investors panicked, started dumping pesos, and its value plunged. Instead of a marginal downward adjustment, the value of the currency dropped precipitously. "Hot money" invested in the short-term Mexican capital market fled the country and created a "Peso Crisis," the reverberations of which ("the Tequila Effect") shook other emerging capital markets around the world.

Durito Returns Amidst the Thunder of War

The response of international capital and the Mexican government to this crisis and to the evidence of Zapatista political strength was severe. On January 13, 1995, Riordan Roett, a consultant to Chase Manhattan Bank (and former director of Latin American Studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies) sent a newsletter to Chase's investors in emerging markets stating that "the [Mexican] government will need to eliminate the Zapatistas to demonstrate their effective control of the national territory and security policy."² Within weeks, Zedillo unilaterally terminated discussions for new negotiations, ruptured the yearlong ceasefire and launched a new military offensive against the Zapatistas.

The government orchestrated press conferences and a media campaign claiming to have evidence of Zapatista plans for urban guerrilla attacks and proof that the "real" identity of Subcomandante Marcos was Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, a former university professor from Tampico. Zedillo issued arrest warrants against him and other alleged Zapatista leaders. To enforce these warrants and to eliminate the Zapatista movement, he ordered 60,000 troops into the mountains of Chiapas.

1 Not only would Salinas not get the post, but he would also wind up in exile after revelations of his family's corruption forced him to flee Mexico.

2 Alexander Cockburn and Ken Silverstein, "Major U.S. Bank Urges Zapatista Wipe-out: 'A Litmus Test for Mexico's Stability.'" *Counterpunch* 2:3 (February 1995), 1, 3.

More broadly, the Zedillo government launched a devastating economic attack against Mexican civil society for its support of the Zapatistas and their demands for greater democracy. Backed by a \$50 billion package organized by the Clinton administration to bail out the Mexican capital market, the Mexican government and foreign investors, the Zedillo administration imposed a brutal austerity of high interest rates, rising unemployment and falling wages, while accelerating sales of the nation's assets to foreign investors. The collateral to the bailout loans was Mexico's national oil reserves.

As brutal army offensives burned their homes and destroyed whatever they left behind, the Zapatista army and thousands of people from their base communities fled into the jungle, enduring great hardships as refugees. Their urban supporters and the broader grassroots pro-democracy movement, however, mobilized hundreds of thousands of protesters who took to the streets of Mexico City and other major cities around the world, demanding an immediate end to the military offensive and a withdrawal of the troops. Supporters of the Zapatistas, recognizing a common struggle against the same kind of neoliberal policies they themselves suffered, demonstrated in over 40 countries at Mexican embassies, consulates and, in some cases, Chase Manhattan Bank branches.

It was during the Zapatistas' "strategic withdrawal" from the military offensive that Marcos, once again, stumbled across Durito. After recuperating from the shock of learning about the threat posed to beetles by 60,000 pairs of boots tromping around the jungle, Durito shared his analysis of the Mexican regime and its neoliberal program. Neoliberalism, he argued, is an ad hoc, improvised response to the crisis of the capitalist order. The inconsistency of Mexican government, negotiating one day, sending in the military the next, he explained, is symptomatic of such improvisation. "Well," Durito concluded, "it turns out that 'neoliberalism' is not a theory to confront or explain a crisis. It is the crisis itself made theory and economic doctrine! That is, 'neoliberalism' hasn't the least coherence; it has no plans or historic perspective. In the end, pure theoretical shit." (**Durito II**)

As the military offensive continued, worries about the possibilities of being bombed by the Mexican airforce led, on the 12th day of the withdrawal, to a discussion between Marcos and Durito about the possibilities of hiding in caves. In this context Marcos told Durito a story about a very particular cave. (**The Cave of Desire**) The story recounted the trials and tribulations of an ugly man who lived alone in the mountains but who one day fell passionately in love with a young woman whom he happened to see bathing and washing clothes in a stream. When a fierce storm drove him to take refuge in a cave, he found strange things and never returned. Durito's expedition to find the cave was washed out by a torrential downpour.

By April 1995, two months of protests forced the government to agree to a new ceasefire and a new round of negotiations mediated by two groups. The first was the National Intermediation Commission, or CONAI (Comisión Nacional

de Intermediación), made up of independent and respected individuals organized in late 1994 by Bishop Ruiz. The second was the Commission on Concordance and Pacification, or COCOPA (Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación), consisting of representatives of the various political parties in the Mexican National Assembly (House of Representatives). These two groups arranged for negotiations between the EZLN and the government to take place at San Andrés Larrainzar (renamed by the Zapatistas “San Andrés Sacamch’en de los Pobres”), a Tzotzil community in the Chiapas highlands north of San Cristóbal.

Unlike the ceasefire a year earlier, however, the Mexican Army did not withdraw but remained entrenched in the Zapatista areas they had invaded. The continued military presence—which included the proliferation of new bases, roadblocks and check points, increasing acts of intimidation and the beginnings of government financed and armed paramilitary terrorism—created a highly tense backdrop to the new negotiations. During the preparations for these negotiations, Durito proclaimed himself “the knight-errant Don Durito de la Lacandona,” and appointed Marcos his squire, much to the latter’s astonishment. **(Durito Names Marcos His Squire)**

In another memorable moment of light-hearted interaction between Durito and Marcos during this period, they played at being bullfighters while high in a ceiba—a very tall tropical tree common in Chiapas. After Marcos used his bandana as a cape to make passes at a crescent moon, Durito showed him some of his own moves that, he claimed, were taught to him by Federico García Lorca, the famous Spanish poet. **(Durito Names Marcos His Squire)** Unfortunately, just when Durito thought he had found a real bull to fight, it turned out to be a swarm of wasps from which he fled, leaving Marcos to be attacked and stung. **(On Bullfighting, Détente and Rock)**

On April 20th, on the eve of talks between the EZLN and the government, thousands of people from Zapatista base communities and groups of supporters gathered in San Andrés to form a human chain as a security cordon to protect their leadership. Embarrassed by this outpouring of popular support, the government demanded they leave; it was only after the EZLN asked most of them to return to their communities that the talks proceeded. The talks ended on April 23rd with essentially no progress towards resolving the conflict in Chiapas. It was agreed that a second round of negotiations would begin on May 12, 1995.

Meanwhile, Durito traveled to Mexico City on his valiant steed Pegasus (a turtle) to challenge Fidel Velázquez, general secretary of the Confederation of Mexican Workers since 1941, to a duel. **(Durito III)** Fearful of rank and file anger over the government’s austerity program, Velázquez had canceled the traditional May Day Parade for the first time in 75 years. Despite his efforts, the parade took place as hundreds of thousands of rank and file union workers and their supporters (including Durito), took to the streets of Mexico City in a tremendous expression of protest.

Although the ire of the protesters was directed primarily at the austerity imposed by the Zedillo administration, the people in the streets also expressed solidarity and support for Zapatista demands, further embarrassing the government. Shortly thereafter, Marcos received a postcard from Durito describing his participation in the demonstrations. Struck by the power and enthusiasm of the sheer number of workers protesting, Durito wrote that, “the only thing missing was a revolution.” (**May Day Postcard**) Damning the union bureaucrats for not standing up for the workers, Durito announced he would seek out those trying to create a truly independent labor movement.

The second round of negotiations, from May 12-16, also produced very little. Although the government promised to withdraw its troops from selected areas, the military occupation and daily harassment of communities continued. Through the use of regular troops and paramilitary forces, the Zapatista communities were surrounded and terrorized as part of a “low intensity war” strategy of the sort taught at the infamous “School of the Americas” in the U.S. These efforts to break the Zapatista will and ability to resist involved not only land occupations, insults, interrogations and repeated low-level flyovers, but also theft, the destruction of property, dissemination of false information, forced eviction, imprisonment, rape, torture, disappearances, and murder. Frustration at the hypocrisy and duplicity of the government and its unwillingness to seriously discuss issues at the national level while conducting a low-intensity war, led the Zapatistas to imagine once again a creative initiative that would outflank the Mexican state.

The Zapatistas’ new initiative called for a National Plebiscite for Peace and Democracy (Consulta Nacional por la Paz y la Democracia) in which they took their struggle directly to the Mexican people. Asking civil society to express an opinion of the demands being made by the Zapatista rebellion—without the mediation of the government or recognized political parties—the Consulta, like the convening of the National Democratic Convention a year earlier, was an unprecedented form of direct democracy. “Never before in the history of the world or the nation,” Marcos explained, “had a peaceful civil society dialogued with a clandestine and armed group.” (**Fourth Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle**)

The organization of this Consulta occupied the Zapatistas and their supporters during most of the summer of 1995. A successful appeal to the non-governmental, pro-democracy Mexican group Civic Alliance (Alianza Cívica) meant thousands of voting booths were installed all over Mexico to facilitate widespread participation. The massive organizing effort by Zapatista supporters carried the word of this initiative not only throughout Mexico but also around the world, allowing foreigners an opportunity to express their opinion in writing or via the Internet.

To provide a political explanation for why such efforts to bypass the current political system were necessary, Marcos passed on, through a communiqué pub-

lished in early June, a letter written by Don Durito to a university professor at the Autonomous University of Mexico, or UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México). (**Durito IV**) This letter, written while Durito accompanied a 41-day protest march from Tabasco to Mexico City, presented the Zapatista critique of the Mexican political system. In this missive, Durito made three points that clearly differentiated Zapatista politics from those of the traditional Leninist Left. First, he argued that no one formula, organization, method or leader can succeed in bringing about the changes that are needed; it must be a collective anti-vanguard process that includes many approaches. Second, the goal of the revolution is not the seizure of power or the construction of a new order; it is, instead, the creation of the conditions necessary to build new worlds. Third, the conditions that the revolution must create are democracy, liberty and justice. From these premises, Durito critiqued the fragmentation of the forces fighting against the party-state that enable the PRI to divide and conquer the opposition and remain in power. He concluded by calling for a national dialogue on how to overcome this fragmentation.

After arriving with the Tabasco protest march in Mexico City, Durito wandered its streets, a solitary Humphrey Bogart-like character complete with trench coat and fedora, depressed by the loneliness of its inhabitants and the useless, stultifying “game of mirrors” that constitutes so much of its political life. (**Durito V**) At one point, through a series of magical gestures, Durito brought to life a music-box ballerina behind a storefront window who danced while he played the piano, and who, after he left to return to Chiapas, escaped from her captivity.

Upon his return from Mexico City, and against the background of preparations for the Consulta, Durito joined Marcos, Camilo and Marcos’ “Other Self” in a round of self-criticism. In describing the scene Marcos evoked an Italian film about family infighting. The whole situation playfully mocked a traditional Leftist ritual, in contrast to the Consulta in which the Zapatistas went beyond self-criticism in favor of seeking the opinions of the men and women of civil society. (**Durito’s Return**)

Some time later, Durito announced to Marcos that, using the method he once taught Sherlock Holmes, he had deduced the real force spreading the plague of neoliberalism in Mexico. Behind a public pretense at theoretical and policy clarity and the actual contradictory policies of the Zedillo administration lurks, he declared, a shadowy figure named Stupid Improvisation. With the folly Zedillo and his technocrats learned in their studies in U.S. universities, they have pretended to know what they are doing and what will happen as they hand the country over to unregulated, chaotic market forces. So neoliberalism, he argued, is not only the economic chaos of unregulated markets, it’s also “chaotic theory” and “catastrophic management” as well. When Marcos worried about the possibilities of neoliberalism perpetuating itself indefinitely, Durito reassured him that the chaos of its own internal battles, assassinations and contradictory actions will certainly help undermine it. “Neoliberalism,” Durito concluded, “is the chaotic

theory of economic chaos, the stupid exaltation of social stupidity and the catastrophic political management of catastrophe.” (**Durito VI**)

During the month of August, the EZLN sent a “Durito Productions” video to Mexico City in which Marcos appeared with Durito to explain Zapatista conceptions of the upcoming Consulta. The plebiscite, Durito explained through Marcos’ translation, was intended as one step in an ongoing dialogue with civil society that began with the National Democratic Convention a year earlier. The Consulta, Durito insisted, should not be conceived as a singular act but as a process, one moment of an unfolding encounter and dialogue. He pleaded for this view, noting that the Zapatistas had also originally conceived of the CND in this manner but, because it was viewed by too many as an institution, it died. Durito also insisted that this Consulta, this moment of broad dialogue with civil society, not only sought the participation of self-proclaimed revolutionaries but of all those who want a transition to democracy in Mexico. (**Durito, Chibo, and La Consulta**)

On August 27, 1995, as the Consulta began, Durito sent a letter to members of a European Encounter working in solidarity with the struggle in Chiapas. In that letter, he told a story of a little mouse who, after repeated frustrated attempts, finally discovered how to deal with a menacing cat. In clear appreciation of the international solidarity of those to whom he was writing, Durito denounced nationality as mere “circumstantial accident,” and let them know that he was thinking about invading Europe, possibly in January. (**The Story of the Little Mouse and the Little Cat**)

With over a million Mexicans and over 80,000 foreigners participating, the vote was overwhelmingly in support of the Zapatistas’ demands including democracy, liberty, justice and equal rights for women. Beyond supporting the Zapatista demands, those participating also voted in large majority for the Zapatistas to transform themselves into a political, rather than military, force. Accepting this mandate without giving up their weapons, the Zapatistas renounced further armed actions in favor of non-military political struggle.

Peace talks resumed at San Andrés on October 12, 1995. This time, the Zapatistas outflanked government efforts to keep the dialogues narrowly focused on Chiapas by inviting over one hundred independent intellectuals, activists and representatives of various political, social and indigenous organizations from all over Mexico to convene as “advisors” to the EZLN. The talks were divided into working groups on various sub-themes, such as community and autonomy, justice for indigenous people, the rights and culture of indigenous women and access to the means of communication. The first phase ended on October 22, after eleven days of work.

The next day, the government provoked a crisis by ordering the arrest of Fernando Yáñez Muñoz, who had previously been targeted by the government as being “Comandante Germán” of the EZLN. Fearing that this direct violation of the Law for Dialogue and Reconciliation (which explicitly prohibited arrests

of EZLN leaders as long as negotiations continued) heralded another military offensive such as the one launched the previous February, the Zapatistas declared a “Red Alert.” Angered by the undermining of its attempts at reaching a peace settlement, the legislators of COCOPA pressured the government into releasing Muñoz. In return the EZLN suspended the “Red Alert” and agreed to resume talks with the second round on Indigenous Rights and Culture, which lasted from November 13–18.³

During the second period of negotiations, Durito gave Marcos a copy of cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis’ book, *The Rituals of Chaos*. The book prompted Marcos to draft a long letter to Monsiváis concerning the role of intellectuals in Mexican political life. The book and the discussion between Marcos and Durito provided the occasion for a critique of those intellectuals who propagated and defended the chaos of Salinas’ neoliberal program. In the process, Marcos critiqued the neoliberal ethical mantra of “efficiency” and the propaganda that an alternation of the party in power (e.g., the PRI or the PAN) amounts to democracy. Wielding the metaphor of the mirror, he also extended his critique to the Left and its debilitating illusion of replacing “bad guys” with “good guys.” “The inversion of the image,” he pointed out, “is not a new image, but [only] an inverted image.” The Zapatistas, he wrote to Monsiváis, do not pretend to embody a higher morality (they did, after all, take up arms and use them) or to offer a better world after seizing power (like the Left). They argue instead for “the necessity of fighting for the creation of a space in which a new political morality can be born.” (**Of Trees, Transgressors and Ondontology**) Durito, meanwhile, punctuated Marcos’ analysis with his own musings on art, the Consulta and the fate of Pegasus, who ran off with a Ruta 100 bus—who had taken part in the big strike in Mexico City.

During this period, there are renewed tensions between the PRD and the Zapatistas due to the EZLN’s refusal, once again, to support them at the polls. The EZLN responded to PRD complaints by asserting that the EZLN did not declare war on the government in order to support the PRD or any other political party. Musing on the dangers of a fragmented resistance, Durito told Marcos a story that evoked the historical process whereby the Spanish conquistadors were able to defeat indigenous populations by exploiting the divisions among them. (**The Story of the Hot Foot and the Cold Foot**)

As the year 1995 neared its end, just days before the second anniversary of the Zapatista uprising, Durito mused on Love. In response to Toñita, a little girl who suggested that love is like a teacup that is repeatedly broken and patched back together again, Durito suggested that it can also be thought of in terms of a scale where the good outweighs the bad. But it is a scale, Durito warned, that bears watching, for even trivial things can tip the balance toward indifference. (**On Love, Indifference, and Other Foolishness**)

3 When the Zapatistas marched into Mexico City in the spring of 2001, Muñoz would be appointed primary negotiator with the new Fox government.

On Christmas Day, Marcos wrote to civil society about just how important Durito is, with his energy, his stories and his wonders, in lightening the oppressive conditions of life for the rebels living in the mountains of the Mexican Southeast. In the communiqué he recounted a story told to him by Old Antonio—an indigenous elder who played a key role in teaching Marcos about local customs and wisdom. Old Antonio's story told how the Gods created dreams so the people of the corn could be better and a mirror called dignity so they could see themselves as equals, and so that those who spread hierarchy and darkness across the land could see themselves as emptiness and be undone. (**The Story of Dreams**)

Durito, Accords and Encounters

The year 1996 began with a flurry of successful Zapatista initiatives. In the “Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle,” issued on January 1, 1996, the EZLN lamented the failure of the CND—torn apart by internal conflicts and sectarian politics—and called for the formation of a broad-based “front,” a network of autonomous groups outside party politics or government sanctioned institutions. The creation of the Zapatista Front for National Liberation, or FZLN (Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) was another step in the Zapatista effort to find concrete forms for radical democratic politics.

On January 3, 1996 the Zapatistas convened the first National Indigenous Forum, or FNI (Foro Nacional Indígena) in San Cristóbal. Nearly five hundred representatives from all over Mexico gathered to give vitality to a network of interrelationships whereby indigenous peoples would support and reinforce one another and their struggles, including, but not limited to, those of the Zapatistas. In the closing statement to the forum, Marcos thanked all of those who had supported the Zapatista movement, those who came and those who could not, but whose hearts were with them, including Durito. To the assembly, he recounted a story that Durito told him of a horse who escaped a dire fate by slipping away to another story. (**The Story of the Bay Horse**) By year's end, the dialogues begun in San Cristóbal would congeal in the formation of a new, ongoing National Indigenous Congress, or CNI (Congreso Nacional Indígena).

The Zapatistas also issued a call for the organization of a series of continental encounters of grassroots movements against neoliberalism in April to be followed by an Intercontinental Encounter in Chiapas in August of 1996. This was an audacious call for a level of organization that had never been achieved anywhere before. Nation-states and even well funded non-governmental organizations (e.g., Rio in 1992 and Beijing in 1995) have often organized such global meetings but never before had any grassroots movement had the power to convoke such a comprehensive gathering. These encounters, the Zapatistas suggested, could provide times and spaces where those opposed to neoliberalism and seeking better worlds could come together to compare experiences and ideas. Such actions would constitute the beginnings of an “international of hope” to be

pitted against the neoliberal “international of terror.” (**First Declaration of La Realidad**) The proposed agenda would examine the economic, political, social and cultural aspects of “how one lives under neoliberalism, how one resists, how one struggles and proposals of struggle against it and for humanity.” Their call was answered with an enthusiasm that far exceeded their expectations.

At San Andrés, government representatives finally agreed to a series of Accords on Indigenous Rights. As in early 1994, these Accords were carried by EZLN representatives to Zapatista communities for discussion. They represented a symbolic, if controversial, step forward for the indigenous movement. For the first time, the government of Mexico appeared to accept the principle of indigenous autonomy. Despite later government claims, there is no hint of secession in either the spirit or the letter of the Accords, but rather the recognition and valorization of indigenous traditions and institutions. As Marcos would later explain: “The Zapatistas think that the defense of the national state is necessary in view of globalization and that the attempts to slice Mexico to pieces comes from the governing group and not from the just demands for autonomy for the indigenous peoples. The EZLN, and the best of the national indigenous movement, does not want the indigenous people to separate from Mexico, but to be recognized as part of the country with their differences.” (**Seven Loose Pieces of the Global Jigsaw Puzzle**)

Zapatista advisor Gustavo Esteva notes that the Zapatistas did not put forward a specific definition of autonomy as a program, but a claim that would validate already existing notions of autonomy such as that of a Yaqui leader who stated: “Autonomy is not something that we need to ask someone or that someone can give to us. We occupy a territory, in which we exert government and justice in our own way, and we practice self-defense. We now claim respect and recognition for what we have conquered.”⁴ The Accords were controversial because they did not include all of the indigenous demands put forth before or during the negotiations. But through a prolonged period of examination and discussion, the Zapatista communities came to view them not as an unsatisfactory final compromise, but as a step forward in an ongoing struggle. These Accords, which the government signed but later refused to implement, would become a key point of reference for the Zapatistas in the years to follow.

The First American Continental Encounter Against Neoliberalism and for Humanity began on April 3, 1996 and paralleled similar gatherings in Europe and other parts of the world. Hundreds of grassroots activists arrived in the village of La Realidad under the noses of the Mexican police, army and intelligence services to discuss continued resistance to neoliberalism. “The most sophisticated and modern war technology,” Subcomandante Marcos declared, “is set forth against wooden weapons, the broken feet and the ancestral philosophy of the Zapatistas, which declares, without shame or fear that the place of knowledge,

4 Gustavo Esteva, “The Zapatistas and People’s Power” *Capital and Class* 68 (Summer 1999): 163.

truth and speech is in the heart. Modern death against ancestral life. Neoliberalism against Zapatismo.” (Opening Speech to American Encounter)

Despite army patrols and flyovers by military aircraft, the participants spent almost a week in intense discussions. For his own presentation, Marcos turned to Durito for help and the latter provided, along with side comments on rock bands and dance styles, a critique of the way history too often appears as a deceptive and badly told tale in which government leaders are the only actors and the people and their dignity disappear completely. (**Durito IX**)

In the European Encounter, several thousand activists gathered in Berlin. Marcos sent a letter explaining that the continuing discussion of the San Andrés Accords made it impossible for any Zapatista representative to attend the European meetings, but he appended a postscript warning NATO that Durito was considering setting off for the conquest of Europe. (**Durito to Conquer Europe**) This warning later proved to have been portentous. At the end of 1996, Durito would disappear and remain mysteriously absent for three years, returning in the fall of 1999, as a pirate just back from Europe.

The talks at San Andrés were followed by another round of meetings on issues of Democracy and Justice. Ironically, the behavior of the government representatives exemplified Marcos and Durito’s worst views of its spokespersons. In a contribution to the Mexican political humor magazine *El Chamuco*, they had agreed that Mexico would be better off if ruled by cartoonists than by the current corps of caricatures in its government. (**Durito on Cartoonists**) At San Andrés, instead of genuinely participating in the discussion, government representatives sat stone-faced and silent, making a farce of the proceedings. At the same time, the police and military intensified their harassment of Zapatista communities. The dramatic combination of silence in the negotiating room and active repression beyond its walls made the real, and very unfunny, intentions of government’s “negotiators” quite clear. The state had brought its pretense of negotiations to an end while accelerating its efforts at repression.

Undeterred, during this period the Zapatistas responded with events such as the gathering in San Cristóbal of over 5,000 indigenous women from all over Chiapas to celebrate International Women’s Day and to protest governmental repression and its effects on women. In early March, against the backdrop of closed-door negotiations among professional politicians from the PRI, the PAN and the PRD over the “reform of the state” in Mexico City, the Zapatistas announced a new list of advisors, once more over a hundred, making the talks into a national forum that included, rather than excluded, civil society.

Later in March, the atmosphere of intimidation took a turn for the worse when the government sentenced Javier Elorriaga and Sebastián Entzin to prison for “terrorism.” It also unleashed paramilitary forces—that it had been covertly arming and training—against Zapatista communities. In Bachajon, paramilitaries known as los Chinchulines, attacked anti-PRIista families, killing several people and burning down their houses. The survivors fled into the hills, becoming the

first of thousands of refugees from this particular phase of the low intensity war. In the midst of such violence, Marcos wrote to European supporters that although “the horizon is becoming overcast, with a gray fading to black,” liberty still waits. Indeed, Durito points out that sometimes one must walk through the night to reach the dawn. (**Durito on Liberty**)

Days after an appellate court exonerated Elorriaga and Entzin and revoked their sentences, another government-funded paramilitary group Paz y Justicia intensified the gathering darkness by attacking Zapatista base communities, burning down villages and driving over 2,000 people into the mountains. Remaining steadfast in their promise to civil society after the Consulta, the Zapatistas did not respond militarily to these murderous attacks but continued to seek peace.

In a letter to the National Campaign for Peace and Against Hunger, Marcos explained that the EZLN would not counter the government’s violence and death with more violence, but with renewed efforts to construct a better world. Instead of war, they would embrace peace; instead of hunger and death they would continue to struggle for the corn harvest. Drawing on Old Antonio, Marcos likened the present period to the annual food shortages and the hunger that face peasants in the difficult weeks before harvest. Durito, for his part, dreamed of an anti-hunger campaign that would bring him ice cream! (**Durito’s Comment on Hunger**) At month’s end, stymied by government refusal to participate in real discussions about Democracy and Justice and in dramatic contrast to a series of closed-door negotiations being held by the main political parties, the Zapatistas organized a Special Forum on the Reform of the State, to which they invited a wide variety of participants from civil society.

When in June a new, armed guerrilla group, the Popular Revolutionary Army, or EPR (Ejército Popular Revolucionario), appeared in the state of Guerrero, the Zapatistas denied any knowledge of or contact with them. In a series of communiqués issued during the summer the Zapatistas affirmed that, unlike the EPR, their politics were not about “taking power” but about creating a political space in which civil society could undertake the restructuring of Mexican politics and society. (This is evoked again in **Magical Chocolates**)

The most dramatic mobilization of the summer of 1996, the First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism convened in Oventic where over 3,000 grassroots activists from over 40 countries gathered to discuss how to resist and transcend neoliberalism. This gathering mobilized on the scale of a military operation, and was convened despite the increased presence of the military forces of the state. Amidst government roadblocks and delays intended solely to harass, participants traveled to five Zapatista communities previously organized as new Aguascalientes—after the original Aguascalientes built in Guadalupe Tepeyac for the CND in 1994 (and destroyed in the government offensive of 1995). In all five communities, which had built meeting spaces, mess halls, shelters and latrines, thousands organized themselves into workshops for

intense discussion. Although ski-masked Zapatista soldiers were in attendance everywhere, they had not organized the meetings to disseminate their own ideas. Instead, they had built concrete expressions of their politics: spaces in which representatives of civil society could seek new paths of resistance and creativity among themselves.

Accords, Encounters and the “Low Intensity War”

In preparation for this momentous gathering, Marcos prepared a series of interventions, two of which draw on the advice and contributions of Durito. In an effort to assist Marcos in preparing a presentation for the workshop on culture and media, Durito showed him a story written by Bertold Brecht (which Durito claimed to have dictated to Brecht) about sharks. While “Brecht’s” story is a rather dark parable of oppression, exploitation, competition and war, Durito brightens it with a tale of revolt and the creation of a new culture in which different kinds of people coexist without division, war, or jails. (**Big Sharks and Little Fishes**)

In a paper presented to the workshop on politics, Marcos recounts Durito’s juxtaposition of the values of neoliberalism and those of resistance and struggle. Playing on the Spanish word *bolsa* that can mean either financial assets such as stocks and bonds, or alternatively vessels for carrying such as pockets, bags, or backpacks, Durito denounces the “value” of the former, while poetically evoking the values of the Zapatistas and the thousands who had come with backpacks to Chiapas:

Can I speak? Can I speak about our dead at this celebration? After all, they made it possible. It can be said that we are here because they are not. Can’t it? I have a dead brother. Is there someone here who doesn’t have a dead brother? I have a dead brother. He was killed by a bullet to his head. It was before dawn on the 1st of January 1994. Way before dawn the bullet was shot. Way before dawn death kissed the forehead of my brother. My brother used to laugh a lot but now he doesn’t laugh anymore. I couldn’t keep my brother in my pocket, but I kept the bullet that killed him. On another day before dawn, I asked the bullet where it came from. It said: “From the rifle of a soldier of the government of a powerful person who serves another powerful person who serves another powerful person who serves another in the world. The bullet that killed my brother has no nationality. The fight that must be fought to keep our brothers with us, rather than the bullets that have killed them, has no nationality either. For this purpose we Zapatistas have many big pockets in our uniforms. Not for keeping bullets. For keeping brothers.” (Presentation in **Seven Voices Seven**)

After days of discussion, debate and amusement, the encuentro, which Durito had nicknamed the “Intergaláctica,” ended with Marcos delivering the “Second Declaration of La Realidad.” This pivotal document called for those

who attended the encounter to return home and build new intercontinental networks of communication, and to interconnect and interweave all moments of resistance against neoliberalism to build a better world together.

As the delegates to the Intergaláctica returned to their countries, the Zapatistas resumed their efforts to negotiate with the government at San Andrés over issues of Democracy and Justice. When the final plenary meeting of those negotiations ended with no progress, the Zapatistas returned to their communities for critical dialogues. At the end of August, they announced their withdrawal from the peace talks, pointing to the absence of any action on the San Andrés Accords, to the mockery of the government negotiators' silence at the second round of talks, and to the continuing military and paramilitary terrorism against their communities.

In the absence of any peace talks and amidst a climate of terror, Durito figured prominently in two September communiqués. In the first, "Love and the Calendar," Marcos finds a bottle that has floated to the top of his ceiba tree with a message recounting the fate of a man who was always late and who missed his own death. The second, which also arrived at the ceiba in a bottle, contains "The Story of the Magical Chocolates," telling of three boys and their different responses to the same options. It also warned Marcos that his ceiba made an excellent military target and told him how to get down from his exposed position.

At the National Indigenous Forum organized in Chiapas the previous January, the Zapatistas and many other indigenous groups had laid the groundwork for a National Indigenous Congress, to be held October 8-12, 1996. Intended as the first of many assemblies of indigenous organizers from all over Mexico, the Congress was scheduled to take place in Mexico City. When the EZLN declared its intention to send representatives, the government threatened to arrest any Zapatistas who dared to leave Chiapas. Pro-Zapatista lawyers pointed out that existing laws protect such travel. Political commentators wrote multiple polemics for and against and the COCOPA engaged in shuttle diplomacy. Amidst tremendous publicity and the threat of reprisals by the government, the Zapatistas sent Comandanta Ramona, well known for her prominent role in the 1994 negotiations in the San Cristóbal Cathedral (and in desperate need of medical treatment in the capital). Her address at the forum was a moment of public victory for the Zapatistas.

In the wake of the National Indigenous Congress and during a series of "tripartite" talks among the EZLN, COCOPA and the CONAI over the possibility of restarting peace talks, Marcos sent a new communiqué to civil society. It contained a story by Durito about the architectural poetry of the first Zapatista Aguascalientes built at Guadalupe Tepeyac for the 1994 National Democratic Congress. In that story, Comandante Tacho points out to Marcos how the illiterate indigenous of Guadalupe Tepeyac had constructed the buildings of the Aguascalientes so that all together they formed a huge seashell, a giant spiral with

an amphitheater at the center. This seashell, Durito points out, is symbolic of Zapatista politics in which the beginning and the end are ambiguous and the focus is not the goal but the search. Durito contrasts this perspective and the ethics it implies with those of Power—evoking the government destruction of the Aguascalientes of Guadalupe Tepeyac in 1995. (**The Seashell and the Two People**)

During the last months of the year, against a backdrop of increasing violence against NGOs working for peace in Chiapas, EZLN representatives met repeatedly with the COCOPA and the CONAI to produce a concrete legislative initiative for the implementation of constitutional reforms in the spirit of the San Andrés Accords. The final draft by the COCOPA was accepted by the EZLN, with reservations since it did not include all of the points previously agreed to in the Accords. Despite the EZLN's good faith efforts, the Zedillo administration rejected the draft and offered an alternative completely at odds with the original content and spirit of the Accords, making explicit the hypocrisy of its pretended interest in a negotiated peace in Chiapas. There would be no more stories of Durito in Zapatista communiqués for nearly three years.

1997 - 1998: In Durito's Absence: Growing State Terrorism and the Mobilizations of Civil Society

Early in 1997, COCOPA's attempt to push through legislation to implement the San Andrés Accords failed in the face of the Zedillo administration's intransigence and its deliberate expansion of paramilitary violence against Zapatista communities. The government's counterproposal, which the EZLN rejected, made it clear to all that the government had negotiated in bad faith. The Zapatista communities responded with marches in January and February demanding that the government honor its agreements.

Instead of responding to these appeals to good faith, government-backed paramilitaries increased their attacks, especially in Northern Chiapas. In Sabanilla, families supporting the PRD were forced to flee their homes by PRIista supporters backed by the police. Near Palenque, the police violently drove 65 families belonging to the indigenous organization Xi'Nich from their homes and communities. The state judicial police arrested and tortured four persons, including two Jesuit priests. A week later, public security forces, the judicial police and the Mexican Army joined forces to attack the community of San Pedro Nixtalucum in the municipality of San Juan de la Libertad. Four were killed and 29 beaten, detained or disappeared. The rest were driven from their homes and forced to flee. Once again there were mass protests. 20,000 joined a Pilgrimage for Peace to Tila to call for an end to the attacks. 150 traveled to Tuxtla Gutiérrez and staged a sit-in before the State Capitol. The government responded with increased attacks by the paramilitaries and continued build-up of military forces around Zapatista communities.

The months of July and August were marked by a dramatic juxtaposition of state and grassroots politics. In August, Federal mid-term elections were held and the victory of opposition parties deprived the PRI of an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies for the first time in over 50 years. This political opening was widely heralded as a major step forward in Mexico's transition to democracy. Parallel to these events in the "Spectacle of the Parties," the Zapatistas organized a very different kind of politics. First, the Zapatista communities boycotted the elections, rejecting the notion that anything approaching democracy can occur under conditions of state militarization and terrorism. Second, the Zapatistas threw their support behind another Intercontinental Encounter Against Neoliberalism and For Humanity that was organized by a coalition of European groups and held in Spain at the end of July. Over 4,000 activists from dozens of countries participated in a mobilization begun the previous summer at the Intergaláctica in Chiapas. Third, the Zapatistas organized a delegation of 1,111 representatives to Mexico City for the founding Congress of the Zapatista National Liberation Front (FZLN) and for the Second National Assembly of the CNI in September. They achieved this despite adamant government opposition and military repression in their communities, which prevented many Zapatistas from traveling within and beyond Chiapas. This trip amounted to a political "breakout" even more dramatic in some ways than the military maneuver of December 1994.

The government's response to these dramatic actions by the Zapatistas was violent. In early November the PRI-backed paramilitary group Paz y Justicia used automatic weapons to attack a caravan of church workers that included the Bishops Samuel Ruiz and Raúl Vera, wounding three in their party. On December 22, 1997 some 70 paramilitaries equipped with automatic weapons, attacked the community of Acteal murdering 45 people. The victims, members of the religious community "Las Abejas" (the Bees), were mostly women and children, attacked while holding prayer services in their church. During this nearly five-hour long slaughter, the only actions taken by the local police were to close the highway so the massacre would not be interrupted. Afterwards, they attempted to conceal the killings by burying the bodies in hastily dug shallow graves and removing any signs of the attack. Their efforts of concealment were, however, unveiled by human rights activists.

The revelation of the Acteal massacre prompted widespread protests demanding an end to state-sponsored violence in Chiapas and calling for an investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the murders. In response, the government increased its military presence in the State, claiming to "disarm" civilian groups. More than 6,000 troops were moved into previously unoccupied areas of the highlands. The Zedillo administration's strategy for misdirection and concealment through increased militarization and harassment, however, was repeatedly exposed by human rights groups who demonstrated how Zapatista communities were being besieged while the paramilitary groups were allowed to

operate with impunity. The World Bank contributed financial support to the government's repression by approving a 47 million dollar credit line the day after the massacre. In the euphemistic language of the Bank and the Mexican government, the money was designated for "Development Programs in Marginalized Areas."

In the early months of 1998, state repression increased with the assassination of peasant leaders and the invasion of several important Zapatista communities by combined operations of the military, the various police forces and paramilitaries. Two of the most notable acts of terror revealed the level of repression and the logic of low-intensity warfare. In January, Rubical Ruiz Gamboa, a leader of the Independent Campesino Organization of Villa Corzo and of the Democratic State Assembly of the People of Chiapas, or ADEPECH (Asamblea Estatal del Pueblo Chiapaneco) was killed in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. In February, José López García from Tila in Northern Chiapas was assassinated after testifying about human rights violations.

In April, the Mexican Army along with state and federal police invaded the tzeltal town of Taniperla in the autonomous municipality of Ricardo Flores Magón. Among the most infamous acts during that invasion was the destruction of a community center decorated with a magnificent mural created by artists from 12 different communities—a mural later celebrated and recreated in various sites on the Internet and around the world. A week later, the same forces invaded the community of Diez de Abril, arresting, torturing and imprisoning notable community members while stealing their money and goods. The same kind of action was repeated in May in the autonomous municipality of Tierra y Libertad. In June, 30 families of Zapatista sympathizers were driven out of Nabil, Tenejapa in a joint action of paramilitaries and public security police. The next day, the municipality of Nicolás Ruiz, legally governed by the PRD, was occupied by a combined force of 3,000 army troops, state and federal police and members of the Chinchulines paramilitary group. Over 150 people were arrested and jailed.

Faced with the absolute unwillingness of the Mexican government to seek a peaceful solution to the conflicts in Chiapas, on June 7, 1998 Bishop Samuel Ruiz resigned in protest from the mediating group CONAI, forcing the organization to dissolve itself. The government's only response was to attack the communities of the autonomous municipality of San Juan de la Libertad three days later. More than a thousand federal troops, judicial police and state security forces invaded the villages. Houses were burned, six Zapatistas were killed and over 50 were arrested. Many residents fled. Several of those taken prisoner were subsequently executed extra-judicially, and after a series of protests their mutilated bodies were returned to San Juan de la Libertad by the state in decorative caskets. Some of the bodies were so badly decomposed that they could not be identified.

Following the Acteal massacre and amidst these widespread state attacks on Zapatista communities, the influx of foreign human rights observers into

Chiapas noticeably expanded. There were many observers from many different groups but the most striking, by their large numbers, were those from Europe, where the Mexican government was being openly critiqued in the Parliament. In February, 200 participants in the International Civil Commission for Human Rights Observation arrived from all over Europe to spend ten days in Chiapas visiting communities and talking to NGOs to gather information regarding the Mexican government's low-intensity war. A second group of 135 Italian human rights observers arrived in May, demanding access to communities that were being subjected to violent repression, such as Taniperla. In clear violation of international law, the Italians were denied immigration permits, but having been invited as humanitarian observers by a community in dire need, they went anyway, to the great consternation of the Mexican government.

The state's response to the negative publicity resulting from these visits was to accelerate their campaign of obstruction and expulsion of human rights observers under the xenophobic rhetoric of defending Mexican "sovereignty." In February, a parish priest of French origin, who had been serving in the Chenalhó diocese for over 30 years, was deported for declaring to the press that the government was responsible for the Acteal massacre. During the April attack on Diez de Abril, Norwegian peace observers were arrested and deported. 85 Italians who visited Taniperla were accused of violating the terms of their visa and barred from returning to Mexico for ten years. 40 more were banned for life. The National Immigration Institute of Mexico announced new regulations for international human rights observers designed to dramatically reduce the number of observers (maximum of ten per group) and freedom of observation (detailed itineraries and a time limit of ten days). The move, coupled with the accelerating number of deportations and denials of visas, constituted an obvious attempt to hide the government's multiplying crimes from the critical eyes of the world.

For approximately four-and-a-half months of this drama, Subcomandante Marcos and the General Command of the Clandestine Revolutionary Committee of the EZLN, or CCRI-CG (Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena-Comandancia General) maintained a long and unprecedented silence. In the place of their voice arose those of the communities that were under attack and whose own spokespersons began to produce detailed "denunciations" of the aggressions against them. In what was later revealed to have been a strategy to break the vision of the Zapatista movement as directed by Marcos and only a handful of "leaders," the EZLN created the space and opportunity for local communities to find and develop their own voice to speak of their plight to the world. The success of this strategy was demonstrated by the large number of local statements distributed internationally via the Internet by groups such as Enlace Civil in San Cristóbal de las Casas and the FZLN in Mexico City.

On July 19, 1998 the EZLN issued the Fifth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, once again taking the government, and the world, by surprise with a call

for a renewal of the Zapatista dialogue with Civil Society. They proposed a new national plebiscite or consulta, “For the Rights of Indian Peoples and an End to the War of Extermination” (Por el Derecho de los Pueblos Indios y el Fin de la Guerra de Exterminio). Bypassing the state, the Zapatistas appealed directly to the people of Mexico, and ultimately the world, to participate in the organization of a formal nationwide vote for or against the objectives of the San Andrés Accords as embodied in COCOPA’s legislative proposal.

In the autumn of 1998, Chiapas suffered torrential rains and flooding that drowned hundreds and displaced over 18,000 people. The flooding was particularly bad because of earlier forest fires that had denuded the hillsides. Many believed that those fires had been started by government forces. The rains brought not only more death and suffering but also more army troops, ostensibly to help the victims. At the national level, Zedillo presented his fourth State of the Nation address in September, making no reference to Chiapas but fueling the anti-foreign-observer propaganda by announcing a no-tolerance policy for outside intervention in Mexico’s internal affairs. At the state level, the elections were postponed until October when a combination of Zapatista abstention and electoral fraud delivered the bulk of the official municipalities into the hands of the PRI. The PRD demanded the annulment of the elections arguing fraud. The PRIista governor Roberto Albores Guillén denied any irregularities and made an additional and incredible claim that no political prisoners were in Chiapas jails. On November 10, 1998 he issued an amnesty to paramilitaries whose existence the state had systematically denied.

On November 20-22, 29 Zapatista delegates, including well-known figures like Major Moisés and Comandantes Tacho, David and Zebedeo, accompanied by members of the Red Cross, joined over 2,000 people from 28 states and 300 international observers for an Encounter in San Cristóbal de las Casas. This gathering was in preparation for the Consulta Nacional on indigenous rights scheduled for the following March. At that Encounter, the Zapatistas announced that over 5,000 of their representatives would travel to all the municipalities of Mexico to spread word of the Consulta and to explain the Zapatistas’ position to potential voters.

At year’s end the Mexican government released the “White Book on Acteal,” a report that attempted to conceal government involvement in the Acteal massacre. Bishop Ruiz celebrated a commemorative mass in Acteal in memory of those slaughtered. The mass was joined by a number of foreigners who were harassed en route by immigration officials and thousands of indigenous Zapatista sympathizers who marched from the refugee camps in Polhó.

1999–2000: Durito Returns to the Struggles of the “Little Ones”

Increasingly desperate to crush the Zapatistas, whose courage and resistance continued to inspire the pro-democracy movement undermining the PRI's diminishing hold on power, the government pursued its dual offensives against Zapatista communities and the international observers who came to bear witness to repeated human-rights abuses. On New Year's Day 1999, the Army sought to intimidate the Zapatista community of La Realidad with hours of low-level reconnaissance flights and troop convoys driving through the village while both military and immigration officials stopped a group of human rights observers organized by the San Francisco-based Global Exchange. The group was detained and photographed, their bus inspected for “explosives,” and several individuals were ordered to appear before immigration officials. A week later, a member of the group was accused of interfering in domestic politics and was expelled from Mexico for life. Undeterred, the U.S. Mexican Solidarity Network announced a delegation of medical personnel to assess the health needs in indigenous villages. Not long after, Peace Action announced a separate delegation to investigate human rights abuses in a number of communities. When a large delegation of Italians went to Acteal and Polhó despite being told not to, they were deported by the Mexican government. Meanwhile, foreign support for the building of an autonomous school in Oventic continued. So too did police, army and paramilitary terror.

Despite such harassment, the Zapatista communities prepared 5,000 delegates to travel throughout Mexico for a national Consulta on Indigenous Rights and For an End to the War of Extermination, while also working to bring in the winter coffee harvest. As in 1995, Alianza Cívica assisted the Zapatistas in their organization of the Consulta. As a result, the group found its San Cristóbal offices vandalized and their computer equipment stolen. The coffee harvest, so essential to the base communities' economic survival, was protected from paramilitary interference by the presence of observers from the Mexican Red Cross and Human Rights Commission.

As the state's repression widened and more and more people from Zapatista communities were arrested on false charges, the struggle spread to the prisons in Chiapas. In February, 30 Zapatista political prisoners from the organization the Voice of Cerro Hueco (La Voz de Cerro Hueco) initiated a hunger strike inside prisons in Tuxtla Gutiérrez and San Cristóbal. The words of this new collective voice began to be heard far beyond the walls of their cells as these unbowed campesinos added their denunciations of unjust and illegal imprisonment to the communiqués flowing with regularity from their communities onto the Internet and throughout the world.

In March, the Zapatistas achieved two very public victories: the Consulta on Indigenous Rights and the further exposure of Mexico's abysmal human rights

record. Although the ultimate impact of the consulta process was impossible to measure, the very large numbers of people involved was striking. Over 120,000 people took part in organizing the Consulta throughout Mexico. 5,000 Zapatistas visited 1,299 municipalities across the country talking with millions of Mexicans. As a result over 2.8 million voted, more than double the number participating in the Consulta of 1995. The Consulta was also organized in 29 foreign countries where over 58,000 also participated in the voting. This huge mobilization and the resounding embrace of indigenous peoples' rights struck directly at the government's refusal to implement the San Andrés Accords. The Mexican government's human rights record was publicly denounced twice: first in a report by Amnesty International titled "Mexico: the Shadow of Impunity," and then by a Mexico City Federal Judge who ruled against the expulsion of foreign observers carried out the previous year during the attack on Taniperlas.

In mid-March, the Zapatistas unexpectedly received publicity on the front page of *The New York Times*. In El Paso, Texas, Cinco Puntos Press was set to publish a bilingual edition of *The Story of Colors* by Subcomandante Marcos, as told to him by Old Antonio. This short book about how the gods had created colors to enliven the world, illustrated by indigenous artist Domitila Domínguez, had been awarded funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). *Times* reporter Julia Preston—long infamous for her anti-Zapatista bias—drew NEA chief William Ivey's attention to the author and the book's connection to the Zapatistas. Ivey promptly canceled the funding and Preston had front-page news. Outraged by the censorship, individuals, independent presses and the Lannan Foundation donated amounts well in excess of the NEA grant to Cinco Puntos Press, allowing for the distribution of thousands of copies of the book. It sold out the entire first printing (5,000), prompting a quick second (7,000) and third (5,000) production runs. The book quickly rose to 25th on the Amazon.com "best-seller" list and at the time of this writing more than 17,000 copies have been printed.

At the end of March, in a feeble, almost comical, attempt to recoup public relations ground lost because of the Acteal massacre and the Consulta, the PRI-appointed Governor of Chiapas, Roberto Albores Guillén staged the first in a series of theatrical productions. 14 fake Zapatista soldiers in crisp new uniforms and brand new ski masks turned in their arms to Albores, members of his cabinet and Army officials in exchange for "amnesty" and 20 head of cattle. The Zapatistas immediately identified each of the false Zapatistas by name as members of the paramilitary Anti-Zapatista Revolutionary Indigenous Movement, or MIRA (Movimiento Indígena Revolucionario Anti-Zapatista) from the community of La Trinidad. They also assured readers that these terrorists would soon be getting their weapons back, courtesy of the Army.

In April, in what seemed like a response to the Consulta's support for indigenous rights, 200 Judicial Police, Public Security Police, Military Intelligence and CISEN (Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional) agents were sent into

San Andrés Larrainzar (where negotiations had led to the San Andrés Accords) to crush the autonomous municipality of San Andrés Sakamch'en de Los Pobres. Filmed by Televisa and Azteca reporters, the police took over the municipal building from the autonomous authorities in order to install a PRI mayor. The next day, however, 3,000 unarmed Zapatistas from throughout the municipality pushed the police out of the community and reoccupied the municipal offices, once again reestablishing the autonomous authorities. The state government immediately signed arrest warrants for those authorities. Two days later, when thousands more indigenous EZLN supporters from all over the state converged in San Andrés to commemorate the assassination of Emiliano Zapata, Albores canceled the arrest warrants and ordered the police to withdraw. The governor then shifted his efforts to the PRI-controlled state legislature, where he introduced a law to re-draw the boundaries of the state's municipalities to undercut autonomous organizations set up by the Zapatista communities.

On April 20, student protests against planned increases in tuition and a government-proposed privatization of the university and in favor of the right of the poor to higher education, congealed into a general strike that shut down the National Autonomous University of Mexico or UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) in Mexico City. This strike closed Mexico's largest university (over 250,000 students attending a scattered collection of schools) and quickly became a central terrain of struggle against the government's neoliberal policies, and would last into the next year. The strikers formed a General Strike Committee, or CGH (Consejo General de Huelga) of over 100 students, called for a national debate over the future of higher education and entered into negotiations with the university administration. The CGH also adopted the Zapatista approach to negotiations, i.e., all questions for decision were taken to the various schools for discussion and vote. The CGH also moved the strike into cyberspace with regular Internet updates and appeals for support from students and professors in other countries. Not surprisingly, the Zapatistas raised their voices in support of the students.

A huge May Day protest march and demonstration in Mexico City's Zócalo was highlighted by the arrival of several Zapatistas to celebrate the raising of a 26-foot high, black bronze sculpture titled "Pillar of Shame," commemorating the massacre at Acteal and condemning the government for its responsibility in the incident. The sculpture was brought to the Zócalo by the National Indigenous Congress and CLETA (Centro Libre de Experimentación Teatral y Artística), an organization of politically active artists. Later this artwork was permanently installed in Acteal, and its creator, Jens Galschiot, was promptly expelled by immigration authorities. Two days later, Global Exchange, Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center, the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights, and the "All Rights for Everyone" Human Rights Network released a joint report titled "Foreigners of Conscience: The Mexican Government's Campaign Against International

Human Rights Observers,” detailing the sanctioning or expulsion of some 300 foreigners over the previous five years. Time and again, the report pointed out, the Mexican government had violated its own laws in its frantic attempts to keep the world from learning about its campaign of terror in Chiapas.

The summer of 1999 was marked by three developments. First, the government stepped up its program of road-building in Chiapas, a standard feature of counter-insurgency programs in rural areas with rebellious populations and difficult terrain for military countermeasures. This road building was rationalized in the standard way: as a dimension of economic development to help farmers get their products to market. The road building was financed in part with World Bank funds made available immediately after the massacre at Acteal. The hypocrisy of the road building became obvious during the confrontations between the Army, the road builders and the people of the community of Amador Hernández in the Montes Azules region. As the Army moved in, cutting down trees, building a heliport, flying in more and more soldiers and stringing more and more razor-edged barbed wire, the local “beneficiaries” protested continuously. Even those who had previously thought a road might be useful spoke out and carried petitions against what was clearly a military invasion. Soon people from other adjacent communities joined the protests. Students from as far away as Mexico City made the trek through the forest on foot to join the opposition to this project. Faced with this spreading opposition the government backed off and renounced building the road. But the soldiers remained in their camp—a continuing threat that the project might be resumed.

Second, in May a Second Encuentro between the EZLN and Civil Society took place in La Realidad. More than 1,500 people, including striking students and militant industrial workers, met with a hundred Tojolabal, Tzotzil, Tzeltal and Chol Zapatista delegates to assess the experience of the Consulta Nacional and to continue the dialogue begun the previous November. Organized into five workshops, the participants shared their experiences of the Consulta and discussed the current situation in Chiapas and future plans. Making his first public appearance in two years, Marcos read the EZLN’s opening address using Federico García Lorca’s poetry to evoke the possibilities of changing the “laws” and defying “fate.”

Third, in August a National Encounter for the Defense of Mexico’s Cultural Heritage was convened by the EZLN and by students from the National School of Anthropology and History, or ENAH (La Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia). The motivation for the gathering was a recent move in the federal legislature to extend privatization of the nation’s wealth to the cultural sphere by handing over many of Mexico’s great Aztec and Mayan ruins to private entrepreneurs. The encounter, however, dealt with a much broader range of issues, including workshops not only on legislation of cultural heritage but also on cultural diversity and identity, tourism, education, and the relationship between academics and indigenous peoples. Some of the students and professors who

attended this encounter also organized trips to Amador Hernández as civil observation teams to bolster that community's resistance to the military incursion.

In the shadow of the UNAM strike, the first Democratic Teachers and the Zapatista Dream Encuentro took place in La Realidad July 31–August 1, 1999. The EZLN invited primary and secondary school teachers to reflect on the growing privatization that threatened public education, on the interconnections between teaching and the Zapatista principles of “laterality, inclusion, tolerance, diversity, and democracy,” and on the struggle for democracy inside teachers' unions. In a series of communiqués to the gathering, Marcos called for teachers to play key roles in building bridges among their own struggles and many others, including those of the students at UNAM, those of electricians against the privatization of the electrical industry, and those of the indigenous in Chiapas.

The UNAM strike continued throughout the summer and fall. The government and anti-strike forces sought repeatedly to play upon differences among the striking students to split the student movement between moderates and “ultras.”

In October, in the first of a five-part communiqué entitled **The Hour of the Little Ones**, Marcos announced the return of Durito from a long sojourn in Europe. Dressed as a pirate and calling himself “Black Shield” Durito arrived unexpectedly at Marcos' ceiba in a sardine-can frigate. To explain both his appearance and his absence, he recounted a surreal voyage through Europe in which he was recruited by the shade of the 16th-century pirate Barbarossa to carry on the tradition of true piracy (as opposed to corporate and government piracy). In that voyage he also met with European cultural icons including Dario Fo, José Saramago, Joaquín Sabina and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán.⁵

The second part of the communiqué denounced government corruption and the paucity of help for the victims of recent natural disasters in Chiapas, while the third part supported the struggles of undocumented Mexican workers and Latinos more generally in the United States. The fourth part was dedicated to “lesbians, homosexuals, transsexuals and transvestites” and included a Durito retelling of the story of the 18th-century pirates Mary Read and Anne Bonny.

The last part of the communiqué dealt with the UNAM strike through a letter to a newspaper photograph of police beating two young students demonstrating against press coverage of the strike. The students had been peacefully blocking a highway when they were violently assaulted by Mexico City police under orders of the PRDista mayor Rosario Robles. Marcos thanks the photograph for revealing what the Mexican government-controlled press would have

⁵ Dario Fo is a Nobel Prize-winning (1997) Italian author and performer. José Saramago is a Nobel prize-winning (1998) Portuguese author and outspoken Zapatista supporter (and contributor of a preface to a collection of Durito stories published in Chiapas). Joaquín Sabina is a well-loved Spanish musician. Manuel Vázquez Montalbán is a famous Spanish mystery writer, essayist and author of a book on the Zapatistas.

hidden and how much the current PRD city government is like the previous PRI one.

As the year 1999 moved into its final month, the anti-neoliberal shockwave started by the Zapatistas in 1994 and promulgated by the Intercontinental Encounters in 1996 and 1997 made headlines once again when 30,000 demonstrators from all over the world swept into Seattle, Washington to protest and ultimately block the meetings of the World Trade Organization. Protests against the WTO had begun in Geneva, Switzerland the year before, organized by an alliance of pro-Zapatista solidarity groups and peasant organizations from India, but it was the failure of the local and federal government in the U.S. to stem the protests and keep the WTO meetings on track that brought global news coverage and elite outrage. Some demanded that the next meetings should be held on ships at sea far from such harassment and embarrassing opposition.

To contribute to the building of the anti-neoliberal globalization shockwave the city of Belem in northern Brazil—ruled by the Workers' Party, or PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores)—hosted the Second American Encounter Against Neoliberalism and For Humanity that same December (the first was in April 1996). The momentum would continue to build in the coming year with demonstrations against elite policy-makers in Davos, Switzerland and Washington, D.C.

The millennial and election year 2000 began with the formal political parties (the PRI, the PAN, and the PRD) cranking up their campaign machines to prepare for the July elections. But offstage from this public spectacle, two attacks on the real pro-democracy movement were launched.

First, the Catholic Church announced that Raúl Vera—who most expected to replace Bishop Samuel Ruiz upon his retirement and who had proved sympathetic to indigenous demands for justice—would be transferred out of Chiapas to Coahuila. The transfer of Vera outraged indigenous members of the church in Chiapas and was celebrated by conservatives in San Cristóbal and reactionary clergy elsewhere in Mexico who immediately began suggesting counter-revolutionary Bishops for his replacement. Liberation theology and a real “option for the poor,” they hoped, would soon be replaced by good conservative church doctrine. However, they were sadly disappointed when the Pope named Felipe Arizmendi from Tapachula as the new Bishop of the diocese of San Cristóbal. Although not known as a great advocate of the downtrodden, he was not the kind of bishop the conservatives had hoped for. The indigenous with words, and the government and their paramilitaries by their actions, set about re-educating the new Bishop in the bloody realities of his new diocese.

Second, the UNAM strike was violently broken by a new militarized police force: the Federal Preventive Police, or PFP (Policía Federal Preventiva), patched together with troops from the CISEN, the Federal Highway Patrol and the Military Police. On February 6th thousands of them were sent to invade and re-occupy the university and to arrest more than 250 students, charging them with

terrorism. Despite massive protests, the police would not relinquish their control over the university; the strike was over and the student movement was reduced to trying to defend their imprisoned comrades.

In response to the breaking of the strike, Marcos wrote to Don Pablo González Casanova, former rector at UNAM who had resigned from the university in protest of the student arrests, and shared some texts written by Durito that targeted lying, self-serving politicians and sycophantic Catholic clergymen and intellectuals. In these, Durito mocks government representations of the economy that praise growth and ignore suffering. He blasts the Catholic hierarchy that cultivates state power (by doing things like exiling Raúl Vera from Chiapas) and derides right-wing intellectuals who lose the battle of ideas (with people like González Casanova) but who win seats at the tables of the powerful by their willingness to rationalize and justify injustice. Durito also denounces the media for presenting only what suits the wealthy and powerful while keeping the embarrassing struggles of the little ones, such as the continuing efforts of students in Mexico City and the indigenous in Chiapas, out of public view. But it is there, “far from the front page” Durito asserts, where the real story of Mexico is being played out. (**Off the Record: La Realidad**)

On March 8, 2000, in celebration of International Women’s Day, several thousand Zapatista women occupied the XERA radio station in San Cristóbal de las Casas, demanding rights for the indigenous and women. In their honor, Marcos describes both the difficulties women have faced in the EZLN because of male prejudice and the importance of their work. In response to Marcos’ sadness at having drifted apart from one woman in particular, Durito gives him advice on lovesickness that leads him to share with her Old Antonio’s **Story of the Air and the Night** in which the old gods created things to accompany each other: air and birds, words and night, men and women.

The government offensive against the Zapatistas took a new turn during the winter and spring of 2000, as a campaign was opened against Zapatista communities in the Lacandon jungles of the Montes Azules biosphere. Spearheaded in the press by Secretary of the Environment Julia Carrabias, and on the ground by military and police forces, the government falsely accused the communities for ecological destruction and announced their imminent removal. But those communities were dedicated to the preservation of the environment and not its destruction, certainly not the wanton cutting of the forest for commercial profit ignored by the government in the past. Many determined that the government’s real aim was the destruction of the Zapatistas, on the one hand, and clearing the way for multinational corporate exploitation on the other. As a result, the defensive self-mobilizations of the communities to resist eviction drew support from environmentalists and other civil society activists.

The political summer of 2000 was successfully usurped by the formal electoral spectacle as it became clear that the PRI might lose the elections because of the successes of the pro-democracy movement’s fight to reduce electoral fraud.

The Zapatistas, for the most part, stood apart from both the spectacle and from participation. Neither the danger that the rabidly anti-Zapatista PRI candidate Francisco Labastida might come to power and unleash the military against their communities nor the declaration by the PAN candidate Vicente Fox Quesada that he would end the conflict in Chiapas “in fifteen minutes” by ordering a military withdrawal and sending the San Andrés Accords to Congress for approval were enough to draw the Zapatistas onto the electoral stage. Despite the PRI’s expenditure of millions of pesos in vote-buying, on July 2nd it was swept out of presidential power by voters whose demands for at least minimal democracy had been growing for the last six years. The PAN candidate, Vicente Fox, won the elections, eclipsing both PRI and the PRD.

With state elections coming up in August and Fox not due to take office until December, the Zedillo government continued its war against the Zapatistas with paramilitary attacks on the community of Tierra y Libertad. Wanting to extend the change in Mexico City into Chiapas, eight political parties joined together to support a common anti-PRI candidate: the ex-PRIista and pro-Fox Pablo Salazar Mendiguchía. Salazar’s campaign promised to end PRI corruption and violence and to bring real peace to Chiapas. In tune with Fox’s intention to continue neoliberal economic policies, Salazar voyaged north to talk to U.S. business and government leaders about how his administration would open Chiapas to more foreign investment. Openly backed by the recently elected Fox and seen as a marginal improvement over the PRI by voters in Chiapas, Salazar easily won the election.

Upon taking office in December of 2000, Fox ordered a partial military withdrawal in Chiapas and called on the Zapatistas to return to peace talks. In response, the Zapatistas laid out their conditions for re-engaging in talks: the fulfillment of the San Andres Accords, the release of all Zapatista political prisoners, and the beginnings of serious demilitarization, i.e., the withdrawal of the military from seven of the 279 positions then occupied by the army. Those seven were all in or close to Zapatista communities and included Amador Hernández, Guadalupe Tepeyac (occupied since 1995) and four of the new Aguascalientes. The Zapatistas also announced that they would come to Mexico City the following year to lay their case for indigenous rights, democracy, justice and the implementation of the San Andrés Accords before the Mexican Congress and people.

2001: The Zapatista March for Indigenous Dignity

With the New Year the Zapatistas began organizing their march to Mexico City. The Zapatistas did not ask permission from the government, political parties or local authorities to travel; they simply announced their intentions and began organizing. For years the Salinas and Zedillo administrations had tried to confine them to the jungle, threatening to arrest any who tried to leave. It was only through great political pressure that Ramona was allowed to travel unmo-

lested to the founding of the CNI in 1996. But the new Fox administration—whose leader had sworn to end the conflict in Chiapas in 15 minutes—would take no action to stop the Zapatistas from traveling.

On January 3rd, Marcos issued a communiqué announcing the formation of a new Zapatista Information Center and calling for the mobilization of Mexican activists and allies in other countries. The Information Center would disseminate regular news about organization and itinerary; the call for mobilization invited supporters to either accompany the Zapatistas on their march or to meet them when they would arrive in Mexico City. Within days the Zapatistas announced that they would leave their communities on February 24th and pass first through San Cristóbal and Tuxtla Gutierrez and then through the states of Oaxaca, Puebla, Veracruz, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, Michoacán, Morelos, and the State of Mexico, arriving in Mexico City on March 11, 2001. During the march they met with as much of civil society as organizers could arrange—including the Third National Indigenous Congress in the village of Nurio, Michoacán.

The march was a kind of rolling encounter for the Zapatista delegates, who traveled in buses, accompanied by many supporters and the press. And as they were greeted by cheering crowds in town after town, stopping to meet dozens of delegates from local grassroots communities, explaining their demands and listening to what those who greeted them had to say, it became impossible to ignore the vast base of support that the Zapatistas had generated over the previous seven years. The Zapatistas had requested the participation of the International Red Cross for their own protection, but when Fox refused to allow this, local and international observers, such as the Tute Bianche (or White Overalls) Collective joined the march to guard the Zapatista encampments from the numerous threats and provocations they experienced throughout the trip.

The Third National Indigenous Congress, from March 2–4, was attended by over 3,300 delegates from 41 out of Mexico's 57 indigenous communities, over 6,400 observers, and over 700 invited guests. All of these greeted, hosted, and dialogued with the Zapatistas upon their arrival. These representatives of Mexico's indigenous peoples declared from Nurio their full support for the COCOPA law to implement the San Andrés Accords. They joined with the Zapatistas in denouncing the treatment of the indigenous and in condemning as potentially devastating for local communities the large-scale Puebla–Panamá Plan (PPP) aimed at turning southern Mexico into an industrial–trade corridor. They declared their intention to follow the Zapatista lead in transforming indigenous communities into autonomous municipalities all over Mexico.

As the Zapatistas traveled along their 3,000 kilometer route to Mexico City, the government continued to partially meet the EZLN's three preconditions for talks: they withdrew the military from a few positions, they liberated a few more Zapatista prisoners and Fox reiterated his promise to present the COCOPA law to the Congress. While recognizing these moves as steps in the right direction, the Zapatistas continued to demand the vacating of all seven military positions,

the freeing of all imprisoned Zapatista sympathizers, and the actual passage of the law on indigenous rights.

When the Zapatistas arrived in Mexico City, they were greeted in the Zócalo by more than 250,000 people. The faculty, staff and student body of the National School of Anthropology and History, or ENAH (Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia), put their school in the service of the Zapatista comandancia during their stay in the capital.

In the days following their arrival, the Zapatistas took part in many informal consultations, gatherings with grassroots groups and conferences. Among these many meetings was the March 12, 2001 intercultural meeting of intellectuals at the ENAH on: “Paths of Dignity: Indigenous Rights, Memory and Cultural Heritage” that included Zapatista supporters such as José Saramago, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Carlos Monsiváis, Elena Poniatowska, Carlos Montemayor, and Pablo González Casanova. In his presentation Marcos complained about Durito interrupting his efforts to prepare his speech, but passed on Durito’s pirate-like view of the buses used by the Zapatistas as ships sailing through a supporting sea of resistance and rebellion. He also told a story of an indigenous man who interrupted a chess game among his would-be “betters.” In an unusual manner, Marcos interpreted his story, explaining that the key aspect of the story was not the interruption per se, but the understanding by the indigenous man that the game was missing players both now and in the future: himself and other indigenous people. This ability to dream the future, to imagine other worlds, he juxtaposed to the blindness of the neoliberal declaration of the end of history. (**The Other Player**)

In another talk, this time to children in the neighborhood surrounding the ENAH, Marcos recounted a story dictated to him by Durito for just that occasion. The story concerned a neglected wind-up toy that made itself useful in generating electricity when the power failed. Because not everyone has such a toy, Marcos explained, it would be better not to privatize the electrical industry (a move begun by Zedillo and continued by Fox) and cause a crisis in the availability of electricity. (**The Story of the Little Dented Car**)

One of the Zapatista goals in Mexico City was to formally address the national congress—something no indigenous community had ever been allowed to do. A central theme of this presentation would be their arguments as to why the Congress should pass the COCOPA proposal into law, giving legal form to at least some of the agreements on indigenous rights reached at San Andrés years before. The Congress was split over allowing the Zapatistas to address them. Although the PRD delegates generally supported such a presentation, the majority PRI and PAN delegates at first refused the Zapatistas the right to speak. The popular reaction was outrage; public debate flared, and political pressure began to build.

During those days of controversy, at a meeting with university students at the Azcapotzalco campus of the Autonomous Metropolitan University, or UAM

(Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana), Marcos revealed that he had just discovered that Durito was once a student and then a teacher at UAM, and moonlighted at a nearby refinery, first to be able to pay his tuition and later to supplement his low professorial income. Given Durito's experience and knowledge of Mexico City, Marcos asked him to explain why the PRIista and PANista "hard-liners" were blocking the Zapatistas from addressing the Congress. Durito told him that it was because politicians think life is like writing with a pencil and anything you don't like can simply be erased and rewritten to get rid of anything uncomfortable. They write, erase, and rewrite even though nothing changes but the shape of their words. But what matters, Marcos suggests, is not the pencil but the dream that guides the hand. (**The Hand That Dreams When It Writes**)

Eventually, under tremendous popular and even presidential pressure—fueled by a Zapatista denunciation of racist and "caveman" politicians and a threat to return home—Congress narrowly approved, by a vote of 220 to 210, a resolution to allow Zapatista representatives to speak about the Law on Indigenous Rights and Culture. The presentation was set for March 28, 2001. On that day four Zapatista leaders—Comandantes Esther, David, Tacho, and Zebedeo—spoke to the Congress, explaining the situation of the indigenous and the reasons why a law should be passed recognizing and legalizing indigenous autonomy. A few days later, the Zapatistas returned to Chiapas and Congress passed such a watered-down version of the COCOPA proposal as to make a mockery of the demand for indigenous autonomy and kill any chance for a renewal of peace talks. The EZLN formally denounced the new legislation, recalled Fernández Yáñez Muñoz from his negotiations with the Fox government and said they would refuse any further peace talks until the Congress's acts were reversed.

As the Zapatistas withdrew from negotiating with the government, they turned their efforts to rebuilding and renewing their struggle. Among those places to be rebuilt was the village of Guadalupe Tepeyac. Abandoned in the face of the military offensive of February 1995, the community had been in exile for over five years because of continued military occupation. When the army withdrew as part of Fox's partial meeting of the Zapatista conditions for peace talks, the community returned. In April, the ejidal authorities issued a communiqué announcing their desire to rebuild their destroyed houses and their intention to refuse any official aid, but also their willingness to accept the support of civil society. A construction project that would finally bear fruit in October of 2001 was the installation of an electricity-generating turbine in the Zapatista community of La Realidad. Conceived at the First Intercontinental Encounter in 1996, the project was realized by the donations of Italian communities and the efforts of the Mexican Electricity Unionists working together with community volunteers. Thus, through national and international solidarity, one community was able to overcome the supreme irony that Chiapas generates much of Mexico's hydroelectric power while thousands of its villages have no electric service!

The government's reaction to the Zapatista withdrawal was to return to a policy of military and paramilitary harassment during the summer of 2001. Military patrols were increased, helicopter flyovers multiplied and soldiers began stopping and interrogating individuals inside their own communities. Part of this harassment was the intensification of road building. Not surprisingly, as the Zapatista communities pointed out, such roads were often driven right through crops and coffee plantations with no concern or compensation for the losses of the local owners. Another part of the government's renewed offensive was an effort, within the process of privatization begun under Salinas, to divide ejidal lands that had been collectively owned by the communities in favor of pro-government factions. Finally, in the summer and fall, paramilitary attacks increased in number and intensity; lands were seized and members of Zapatista communities were injured or killed. All of these actions were described and denounced in communiqués publicly issued by the various affected communities.

Repression of the struggle for democracy, liberty and justice came at the national level in the assassination of prominent human rights activist and lawyer Digna Ochoa y Plácido on October 19, 2001, in Mexico City. Ochoa had previously been kidnapped and left to die for defending those tortured by the military and police, and had recently received numerous death threats. Despite the Inter-American Court for Human Rights' request that she be protected, the threats had been largely discounted and ignored by the government. Along with her body, riddled with 22-caliber bullets, was found yet another death threat, this time against her colleagues the Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center and . Unlike the daily outrages perpetuated in indigenous communities, her murder brought public outcries and made it clear that such vicious repression continued unabated under the Fox government.

The year ended with continuing repression in Chiapas and the refusal of the Mexican government to recognize and accept demands for indigenous autonomy that the Zapatistas had brought to the Capitol early in the year. It also ended with the celebration of the eight years of struggle since January 1, 1994 and renewed determination of Zapatista communities to continue their own self-organization and resistance.

2002: Rebeldía, Terrorism and Apples

Although the EZLN did not officially attend, July witnessed an important gathering in San Cristóbal de las Casas intended to revive a dialogue regarding peace in Chiapas. More than a thousand people participated in the National Encounter for Peace with Justice and Dignity from July 5-7, including many people from the Zapatista base communities. Those gathered represented activists, indigenous and non-indigenous, from 285 organizations, 23 states of the Republic and 13 countries.

Paramilitary violence persisted throughout the year. The Autonomous municipality of Ricardo Flores Magón decried the emergence of the

Organization for the Defense of Indigenous and Campesino Rights, or OPDIC (Organización por la Defensa Indígena y Campesina). This new paramilitary force was alleged to be under the direction of Pedro Chulín, a PRI congressman who also had links to Revolutionary Indigenous Anti-Zapatista Movement, an earlier paramilitary group with a history of violent activities. On July 31st, OPDIC attacks wounded seven members of the ejido La Culebra. On August 7th, José López Santiz from the autonomous municipality of 17th of November (Altamirano) was assassinated. Less than two weeks later nine members of Crucero Quexil (autonomous municipality of San Manuel) were wounded. On August 25th, two officials of Ricardo Flores Magón were gunned down at Amaytik village (Ocosingo) and another was killed at the autonomous municipality of Olga Isabel (Chilón).

While Zapatista municipalities were being subjected to lethal levels of paramilitary violence, the National Supreme Court of Justice, or SCJN (Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación) deliberated over 3,000 challenges to the legitimacy of the indigenous law reforms, approved by Congress in April 2001. Those challenges argued that the reforms ran drastically counter to the spirit of the San Andrés Accords, to which the government had previously agreed. On September 6th, 2002, the SCJN rejected all of the challenges—a move seen by many as further evidence of the government's lack of commitment to change.

During October, a number of gatherings and direct actions occurred throughout the region as part of the growing mobilization against the Puebla-Panamá Plan. The First Chiapas Meeting Confronting Neo-liberalism convened in San Cristóbal de las Casas from October 9–12. As the meeting ended, direct actions, including roadblocks, demonstrations and other actions along borders, protested against increased privatization, biopiracy, militarization and maquiladorization associated with the PPP and the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA). Opposition also took root nationally as the National Consultation Against the FTAA was inaugurated throughout Mexico.

In November, the PGR disbanded the Special Unit for the Handling of Crimes Committed by Armed Civil Groups, a special division established immediately following the massacre at Acteal. Despite Governor Pablo Salazar's very public efforts to prosecute prominent figures responsible for violence, the decommissioning of the investigative unit underscored doubts regarding the government's commitment to address the widespread aggressions being carried out by paramilitary forces.

The official silence of the Zapatistas during this period led some to pronounce the EZLN a political force weakened by its failure to achieve the implementation of the San Andrés Accords, and quickly fading as a factor in Mexican politics. On November 17th, Subcomandante Marcos broke that silence by responding to Zapatista critics in a communiqué published in the recently established magazine *Rebeldía*. Included in that communiqué was an account of Durito's musings on apples. While some eat ripe apples and others eat green or

rotten apples, Durito suggested, the Zapatistas take the seeds and plant them so that some day everyone will be able to eat apples in whatever form they choose.

(Apples and the Zapatistas)

On November 25th *La Jornada* published another communiqué, this one written a month earlier and sent to Ángel Luis Lara, or El Ruso, celebrating the inauguration of a new Aguascalientes in Madrid. The communiqué addressed the struggles of the Basque people against Spanish colonialism and criticized King Juan Carlos, Prime Minister José María Aznar, ex-Prime Minister Felipe González Márquez and Judge Baltazar Garzón for their repression of the Basque people. When Garzón replied with a vituperative letter challenging him to a debate, Marcos—claiming the traditional rights of the challenged—named the Canary Island of Lanzarote and set as a condition that Garzón attend an encuentro to be called “The Basque Country: Paths” that would be organized and attended by all the parties involved in the political struggle in Euskal Herra (Basque). He also wrote to the Basque separatist organization ETA, or Euskadita Askatasuna, requesting them to consent to a ceasefire for 177 days and to attend the encuentro. Finally, he wrote to the Spanish Left and to Spanish civil society asking them to participate in pressuring the ETA and the Spanish state to participate in the encuentro.

Marcos’ letter, calling for the replacement of terrorism (both by the state and by the ETA) by encounter, debate and political negotiation, caused an enormous stir in Spain. The State tried to use its ambiguous language about the ETA to accuse the Zapatistas of supporting terrorism. For its part, the ETA denounced this Zapatista intervention, accusing Marcos of not respecting them and thus not respecting the Basque people. On the other hand, over 57 academics, journalists and artists responded positively by organizing a Civil Forum for the Word on December 22 as part of the preparation for a larger Encounter scheduled for April 22.

In a follow-up communiqué to the ETA, Marcos pointedly remarked that both they and Garzón accused the Zapatistas of disrespecting the people they represented. Does the ETA really represent the Basque people, he wondered? Does Garzón represent the Spanish people? The Zapatistas, he pointed out, represent no one but themselves. Moreover, he unambiguously denounced the killing of innocent civilians and those who disagree, whether this killing is carried out by the state or by some self-proclaimed “revolutionary vanguard.” In the strongest language he has ever used to denounce groups like the ETA, Marcos ended his communiqué with the statement: “I shit on all the revolutionary vanguards of this planet.”

During the winter of 2002 the government continued its low-intensity war with an increase in officially sanctioned, forced evictions. On December 19th, the people of the small community of Arroyo San Pablo were forced to abandon their homes. Government spokesmen such as Jaime Alejo Castillo of the Ministry of the Environment, or SEMARNAT (Secretaría de Medio Ambiente

y Recursos Naturales), revived the oft-used argument that the indigenous communities in the Montes Azules Biosphere damage the environment by using outdated farming methods such as slash and burn. Such arguments, however, ignored not only the environment-friendly practices of the communities in question, but also the ambitions of multinational corporations eager to exploit the rich resources of timber, petroleum, water and biologically diverse fauna and flora. Barely hidden in the shadows of the free-market policies and privatization articulated in the PPP and FTAA—and promoted by the World Bank, IMF, Inter-American Development Bank, European Union and USAID—are a legion of corporations ready to exploit the Biosphere. Among those accused of such intentions are: EXXON, Shell, Mobil, Dow Chemicals, Boise Cascade, Smurfit, International Paper, Hyundai, Samsung, Monsanto, Sandoz and the Pulsar Group.

The next year began with a massive mobilization by the EZLN and their communities to demonstrate that their movement was alive and well, and that government repression and their resistance to it continues. At six in the evening of December 31, 2002, over 20,000 Zapatistas from 40 autonomous municipalities marched into the main plaza of San Cristóbal de las Casas. They were armed with machetes and lit bonfires all around the central plaza. The indigenous rebels listened to speeches by seven comandantes: Tacho, David, Brus Li, Fidelia, Omar, Míster and Esther. The comandantes declared their commitment to continue resistance and condemned President Vicente Fox and the rest of the Mexican government for its duplicity and failure to pursue peace. Underscoring their right to speak on issues outside of Chiapas, the Comandancia voiced support for Subcomandante Marcos in his recent exchange with the spokespersons of the Spanish state and the ETA.

At the time of this writing, the Zapatista resistance to government repression continues, as do their efforts to build their own autonomous communities and to develop new and better ways of life. Within that resistance and amidst those efforts, the ever resourceful knight-errant and pirate Don Durito de la Lacandona continues to provide ideas to illuminate the confused and humor to push back the ever-threatening darkness. With a little luck, his squire, scribe and sometimes resentful student, Subcomandante Marcos, will also continue to pass along to us, in his letters and communiqués, whatever enlightenment Durito may have to offer in the future.

Durito says that this is the difference between the Zapatistas and the rest of humanity:

Where everyone sees an apple, the Zapatista sees a seed, goes and cultivates the land, plants the seed and guards it.

March 2003
Austin, Texas

Postscript that adds two notes as this manuscript goes to press.

Note #1: We are pleased to see that the magazine *Rebeldia*, from whose first issue we drew the last story in this volume, continues to pass along stories from and about Durito. For those who, having read the stories that we have prepared here, can't wait to read more, we recommend them to you. *Rebeldia* is available both in hard copy and on the web at www.revistarebeldia.org.

Note #2: During August of 2003, the Zapatistas held one of the most important encounters of recent years. They organized a giant fiesta, inviting their friends and supporters from all over Mexico and the world to celebrate the creation of new forms of organization, both among their communities and between themselves and the world.

Tired of waiting for government recognition of the San Andrés Accords on indigenous autonomy, they have proceeded to elaborate that autonomy in the form of regional autonomous “good governments” to facilitate cooperation among the various autonomous municipalities they had already created. These regional governments will work to overcome imbalances among the municipalities, to mediate relationships between those municipalities and official state municipal governments, to deal with complaints against Autonomous Councils and to monitor the enforcement of rebel law and the carrying out of community projects within the autonomous regions. Finally, these regional bodies will be located within the Aguascalientes, which were built as zones of encounter between the Zapatistas and the larger Mexican and international civil society.

However, these Aguascalientes are also being transformed into “Caracoles” (or seashells) that will not only continue to be places of encounter but will now become the required portals through which supporters must bring any and all proposals for projects. This is aimed at allowing the representatives of the larger regional community to make sure that such outside resources are more evenly distributed throughout the autonomous municipalities rather than accentuating inequalities in income and opportunities.

Thus, these new regional governments represent another innovative step in the Zapatista project of transforming their own world and their relationships with those of us from other worlds. Already, indigenous communities in other parts of Mexico are formally studying these innovations and discussing how they might be adapted to their own needs. The revolution continues.