

Who is the Comandante of Subcomandante Marcos?

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The title of this chapter is intended to challenge us to reflect on a number of mysteries that surround the persona of Subcomandante Marcos and also, through him, the metapersona of the Maya Zapatistas whom he represents. This is of great interest to me as a Mayanist and as an admirer of modern Mexico, for—even as the government has sought to dilute his charisma, in March, 1995, by identifying him as Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente—Marcos's popularity in virtually all sectors of Mexican society can be compared easily with that of JFK in the U.S. in the 1960s. He and the Zapatistas with whom he is associated seem to be articulating something fundamental about the whole Mexican national idea and its ever-ambivalent ties to its Indian past and present.

Although I am tempted to plunge into this large topic, wisdom dictates trying to say something much more limited about the Zapatista movement. In particular I shall try to identify what is Maya about this dramatic insurrection movement. From this, I will propose a core of persistent patterns of Maya world construction, group and personal identity, and political legitimacy that have been expressed with vitality for some two thousand years—including the current events in Chiapas. I will finally identify patterns in the Zapatista movement that suggest the newly emergent character that Maya ethnicity may assume in the multi-cultural Mexican and Guatemalan nations of the twentyfirst century.

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Few events in recent Latin American history have so captivated the attention of the international media as the Zapatista rebellion. However, it has been almost universally interpreted as a peasant rebellion focused on agrarian issues and as a violent critique of Mexico's political system,

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which has systematically marginalized Indians and other underclass groups in the quest for economic growth.¹ Both of these appraisals are undoubtedly true, as we have seen in relentless media coverage and abundant written commentary, including the Zapatistas' own public statements. However, much less has been written or said, by either the Zapatistas or by outside commentators, about what may be distinctively Maya about the Zapatista rebellion. In my view as a long-time observer of Chiapas, the Zapatista movement has been but one dramatic move in a general pan-Maya cultural affirmation movement that is already well underway in Mexico and Guatemala.

The Zapatistas themselves raised the general issue of Indian political and cultural autonomy in Chiapas at the initial round of peace negotiations in San Cristóbal de las Casas in February, 1994. Indeed, as of December, 1994, more than forty Maya communities, both within and outside of the Zapatista-controlled area, had already organized themselves into four autonomous regions. I am not aware of what rights and privileges they claim. Certainly, the Chiapas State and Mexican federal governments have ceded no authority to these self-declared autonomous regions. Locally, however, leaders of the movement claim to have more legitimate authority than the duly elected state-recognized municipal officials and are prepared to function in the event of political vacuum if civil order breaks down. The spirit of the Zapatista demands as articulated in February went well beyond the region; they are seeking nothing less than systematic teaching of Indian history and culture in all of Mexico's schools. Mexico's negotiators have apparently yielded on this issue, although EZLN has not yet, to my knowledge, responded.

While the prospect of this acknowledgment may be cause for celebration, it raises the question of just what constitutes the shared culture and identity of Mexico's many and diverse Indian communities. Beyond laundry lists of 'culture traits' and centuries of shared oppression and marginalization in the shadow of Western colonial culture and the modern world system, was there ever, is there now, any essential 'soul' of Mesoamerican Indian culture? More specifically, how is such an Indian identity, Mayan or other, manifest in the current Zapatista movement?

On the surface, at least, it is not difficult to understand why the Mayan rebels have chosen Emiliano Zapata as their paladin. Although he was of relatively modest, though not impoverished, rural mestizo origin, he did speak Nahuatl well. He championed agrarian reform in both symbolic and substantive ways, and today remains one of the few 'undeconstructed' heroes of the Mexican Revolution. While the link with the symbol of Zapata himself does not seem difficult to understand, other aspects of the Zapatista rebellion's Indian identity are harder to comprehend. For example, why have the Zapatistas chosen Subcomandante Marcos as their spokesperson and most visible leader? He is, after all, a fair-skinned *criollo* who, by his own testimony, bailed out of the gilded upper-middle-class culture of Mexico City. Furthermore, one of the first and most widely publicized martyrs of the first days of the

Zapatista revolt was Janine Pauline Archembault Biazot, a white ex-nun known as 'La Coronela' (the Colonel). She was of French birth and Canadian residency and is said to have died heroically as she led the Indian troops in the siege of the town of Las Margaritas on January 1, 1994. The Zapatistas' collective Indian leadership itself—said to consist of a directorate of Tzeltals, Tzotzils, Tojolabals, and other elders, male and female, from various Indian communities—has thus far remained relatively silent and invisible insofar as any direct contact with the media is concerned. Whatever the political, pragmatic, or symbolic reasons for the low profile of the Indian leadership in the movement, there can be little doubt about its strong Indian constituency, both within Chiapas and outside.

Although Mexico and Guatemala now have dozens of individuals and institutional entities that are currently working toward the goal of pan-Indian solidarity in the areas of literacy, literature, the arts, and social policy, it is nevertheless worthy of note that the symbolic and ideological force behind the growing Indian politicization in Mesoamerica, as in the Zapatista movement itself, does not have an easily identifiable Indian 'center.' What is the nature of this empty center? Who or what is the Comandante of Subcomandante Marcos?

In this chapter, I will identify three themes in the events of the past year that may guide us in thinking about both the Maya past and Maya future. What constitutes the core of how Maya people have thought and acted in history over the past two thousand years? And, from these deep roots, even through them, how is change—such as that sought by the Zapatistas—being effected in the Maya universe today?

Breath on the Mirror: the Opaqueness of Events

In a recent extraordinary book, *Breath on the Mirror* (1993), Dennis Tedlock discusses a central idea, perhaps the central idea, in Maya epistemology. It concerns the opaque nature of human access to reality. As recorded in the *Popol Vuh*, the founding epic of the Quiche people, both the downfall of our proto-human ancestors and the ascent modern human beings involved the drama of the loss of vision:

"The gods were displeased with the fact that their newly created beings could see everything just as the gods could; their vision penetrated all parts of the cosmos, through the mountains and heavens. The gods were not pleased that humans were their equals; their knowledge reached too far:

'And when they changed the nature of their works, their designs, it was enough that their eyes be marred by the Heart of Sky. They were blinded as the face a mirror is breathed upon. Their eyes were weakened. Now it was only when they looked nearby that things were clear.

And such was the loss of the means of understanding, with the means of knowing everything, by the four humans. The root

*was implanted.*¹⁷²

Such, then, is the human condition, that in the great scheme of things, people are never to have easy access to the true scheme of things. Such is this the case that virtually all human perception and related experiences respond to an approximation of reality. The opaqueness of reality in the Maya world is not, as in Plato's parable of the shadows on the cave wall, a preferred, derivative access to reality; the Maya version of this is an obligatory and given aspect of the human condition.

The corollaries that flow from this basic principle in the ancient and modern Maya world are numerous. In the first place, nothing except that which is nearby is ever what it seems to be according to our sense perception. There is always something beyond and outside of the apparent reality that is understood to affect the perceived reality. Such unseeable generative forces have expressed themselves in the everyday life of the Maya for two thousand years. The greatest of these outside forces in the Ancient Maya world was the tyranny of time. The divine mandate of solar, lunar, and Venus and the 260-day calendar cycles intimately affected the unfolding of each day for each individual and for the community in the ancient Maya world.

This so-called chronovision was not a deification of time, but an acknowledgment that all things, human and natural, were programmed with shifting valences of cause and effect as divine cycles located outside the body dictated. Variants of these ancient beliefs persist today in the form of divine solar cycles, individual co-essences and ancestor cults; they figure centrally in the complexity of the extrasomatic configuration of causality. Humans have no choice but to adjust their behavior accordingly. There emerges here an almost unlimited opening for the interpretive skills and political control of shamans and secular leaders who claim to have a less opaque vision than ordinary people. It is probable, in my view, that such clairvoyant skills are attributed to, if not claimed by, the clandestine Indian leadership of EZLN.

Related to the interpretive dimension of the opaqueness of reality are two other strains of Maya thought: inequality and complementary dualism. All things—human, natural and divine—are structured in relational terms such that absolute equality does not exist. Rank and hierarchy permeate Maya thought. Everything that is, at a given moment, belongs to a relational matrix in which forces that are dominant and submissive prevail, often in patterned, predictable forms. Related to this is the concept of complementary dualism such that two aspects, sometimes polar opposites, of a phenomenon, work together to produce what we experience and see. For example, the power of ancestors to affect the lives of the living derives in part from their double gender—the word for them in most Maya languages is 'mothersfathers.' They are neither male nor female, nor equal to each other, but both at the same time.

Surely related to this pattern of complementary dualism is the prevalence of twins and other pairs and multiples thereof in Maya sacred

narrative, ancient and contemporary. Hunahpu and Xbalanque, heroes of the mid-sections of the *Popul Vuh* who eventually become the sun and the moon, whom we conventionally refer to as twins, are not really identical twins, but older and younger brother, respectively. To this day, when Tzotzil Maya see the sun and moon in the sky, they are seeing complementary divine ancestors (in this case son and mother) whose relative powers fluctuate to produce what we experience as day and night.

And so on.... The point is, I hope, made. What we have seen in the Lacandon jungle during 1994 in Chiapas appears opaque to our own eyes, for it has undoubtedly been constructed and understood by the Maya as an effort to act in history in such a way that human uncertainty, the givenness of outside causal forces, and the effort to engage in instrumental behavior to effect change in a hostile environment mesh together in a plausible, credible, and cautious pattern of counterbalances.

The movement cannot have been conceived by a few and delivered as a plan of action to change history and destiny without being cast as something that was somehow destined to happen in the first place, yet for which no single Indian leader wished to assume responsibility as the *principal* leader, for all ethnic groups involved came from different communities of origin in which various readings of legitimate authority were operative. It would therefore have been inappropriate for any one individual to presume to conceive and direct an enterprise of such complexity and uncertainty.

Perhaps this is the central reason that a relatively invisible pan-Maya directorate of men and women provide diffused Indian leadership, while conferring upon a non-Indian, Subcomandante Marcos, the role of spokesperson. This is also, undoubtedly, why the movement is tied emblematically to Emiliano Zapata and to the epic agenda of the Mexican Revolution itself; these are icons that link their own political aspirations with the charter myth of modern Mexico. Given the Zapatistas' own Maya heritage of understanding history as a programmed, divinely ordained process, it is not unreasonable for them to attach their wagon to a well-known and powerful mythical star. The Myth of the Mexican Revolution is surely such a star.

The Extrasomatic Location of Self and Destiny

The quasi-mystical link of their own agenda and destiny with that of Mexican 'democracy' and other principles of the Mexican national idea is laid out eloquently in a communiqué, dated February 26, 1994, from the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee High Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army. The following excerpt constitutes the first paragraphs of this document. We of course do not know from whose pen these words come; however, the poetic and opaque language bears the clear mark of contemporary Maya oratorical style, perhaps mingled with the romantic imagery of Spanish-speaking colla-

borators:

"When the EZLN was only a shadow, creeping through the mist and darkness of the jungle, when the words 'justice,' 'liberty' and 'democracy' were only that: words; barely a dream that the elders of our communities, true guardians of the words of our dead ancestors, had given us in the moment when day gives way to night, when hatred and fear began to grow in our hearts, when there was nothing but desperation; when the times repeated themselves, with no way out, with no door, no tomorrow, when all was injustice, as it was, the true men spoke, the faceless ones, the ones who go by night, the ones who are in the jungle, and they said:

'It is the purpose and will of good men and women to seek and find the best way to govern and be governed, what is good for the many is good for all. But let not the voices of the few be silenced, but let them remain in their place, waiting until the thoughts and hearts become one in what is the will of the many and opinion from within and no outside force can break them nor divert their steps to other paths.

*Our path was always that the will of the many be in the hearts of the men and women who command. The will of the majority was the path on which he who commands should walk. If he separates his step from the path of the will of the people, the heart who commands should be changed for another who obeys. Thus was born our strength in the jungle, he who leads obeys if he is true, and he who follows leads through the common heart of true men and women. Another word came from afar so that this government was named and this work gave the name 'democracy' to our way that was from before words traveled.'*³

Where does the individual stand in the opaqueness of the Maya universe that has just been described? The best short answer is 'not alone,' as the Zapatista communiqué I have just cited reiterates unequivocally. Since at least the time of Christ, the Maya world has evolved a variant of the broader Mesoamerican idea of the co-essence, which, briefly stated, is a fundamental principle of personhood or self which asserts that each individual and his or her destiny are linked to one or a set of co-spirits or co-essences that reside outside the body. These co-essences are typically identified with animals in the Maya area, but may also take the form of other spirit companions. They are often revealed to people in dreams and are therefore known in some parts of the Maya regions by terms related to the proto-Maya *way* ('sleep' or 'dream'). These spirits are given at birth and share with each individual the trajectory of his or her life, from birth to death. These co-essences confer destinies upon individuals that range from power and wealth (most typically associated with jaguars) to humility and poverty (usually associated with small animals such as the rabbit or squirrel).

Since these forces lie outside the body, they are not easy to manipu-

late. One must therefore live within the general parameters of one's given destiny. These co-essences typically have several parts, all of which are fragile and may become lost, frightened or injured, singly or in various combinations. These afflictions of the soul may cause sickness or misfortune in the persona of the corresponding individual, whereupon the afflicted person often engages other supernatural forces (often the souls of shamans and witches who are available for hire) to intervene to restore equilibrium to one's charted destiny. Thus, these beliefs lie at the core of many traditional curing, divination, witchcraft and sorcery practices that are found throughout the Maya region.⁴

These beliefs, which I consider to form the core of the native metaphysics of personhood in Mesoamerica, have been around for at least two millennia in the Maya area, dating from before the time of Christ, and were apparently centrally linked to statecraft and its underlying charters. The iconography of the Olmec civilization, for example, has as its diagnostic feature a jaguar/human being, the features of which merge human and feline traits. This iconographic tradition goes back to at least 1000 B.C., and can plausibly be interpreted as an early expression of the link of the co-essence with theocratic authority. Epigraphers have recently made enormous strides in documenting this concept as it was expressed in the inscriptions and iconography of the late pre-Classic and Classic periods in the Maya and contiguous areas. Justeson and Kaufman have recently deciphered an epi-Olmec text that appears on the Tuxtla statuette (State of Tabasco), dating to 162 A.D. On this piece, the hieroglyphic text specifically says, in relation to the peculiar figure that is being discussed, that *"The Animal Soul is Powerful."*⁵

In the great florescence of the Maya Classic culture, the hieroglyphic inscriptions routinely used a glyph that reads *way* (discussed above, meaning 'sleep' or 'dream') to signify the link between humans and co-essences, both animal and other. (By the way, the diagnostic motif in this glyph is a masked god.) Steve Houston and David Stuart conclude their important report on this topic as follows:

*"In our judgement, the way decipherment fundamentally changes our understanding of Classic Maya iconography and belief. It indicates that many of the supernatural figures, once described as 'gods,' 'underworld denizens,' or 'deities,' are instead co-essences of supernaturals or humans. More than ever, then, Classic Maya beliefs would seem to coincide with general patterns of Mesoamerican thought [...] . Our final point concerns the certainty with which Maya lords identified their co-essences [...] . For the Classic Maya, such self-knowledge may well have been an important marker of elite status."*⁶

This concept therefore appears to lie not only at the very center of Maya thinking about self, society and destiny, but also at the center of their theories of statecraft and political legitimacy via shamanic power. See for example the major recent work by Freidel, Schele and Parker: *Maya Cosmos. Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path* (1993). In this work, as the title suggests, the concept we are discussing is shown to have an im-

pressive life history spanning almost three millenia.

Even as it is true that the political and shamanic practice of these ideas occupied an important place in the public rituals of the ancient Maya, it is also true that the colonial and modern governments of Mexico and Guatemala, and the missionaries who have operated under their patronage, drove these practices and beliefs underground into the privacy of Indian homes and scattered outdoor shrines. It is primarily in this non-public location that they persist in hundreds of Maya Indian communities today. And yet they remain vitally important as an identity marker. In her recent autobiographical commentary, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, the Maya Nobel laureate of Guatemala testifies to the studied privacy of these beliefs and practices among the Maya people of her country:

*"We Indians have always hidden our identity and kept our secrets to ourselves. This is why we are discriminated against. We often find it hard to talk about ourselves because we know we must hide so much in order to preserve our Indian culture and prevent it being taken away from us. So I can only tell you very general things about the nahual. I can't tell you what my nahual is because that is one of our secrets."*⁷

Indeed, virtually all modern ethnographies of the Maya region agree not only on the importance of some form of these ideas to the maintenance of individual and community integration, but also on the studied privacy that is appropriate for any discussion pertaining to these ideas. Thousands of Maya Zapatistas undoubtedly bear such cognitive baggage in their languages, hearts and souls. These ideas cannot be irrelevant to an understanding of recent events. This raises the interesting question of all the masked faces in the Zapatista guerrilla army. Obviously, there is more than security or guerrilla theatre going on here. This will be discussed further in the conclusions.

The Community and Other

A third enigmatic theme that underwrites the Zapatista movement is expressed in their elegantly constructed communiqués that seem to place their own goals within the framework of Mexico's own stated goals about itself. Zapatistas are, on the surface of it, simply demanding to be included in the Mexican national idea that states that Mexico embraces all of its people. This has been a centerpiece of Mexican Revolutionary rhetoric for at least sixty years. How could a Maya indigenous insurrection movement be so charitably inclined toward the ideology and symbols of its stated adversaries? Indeed, the maximal hero of the Mexican Revolution, Emiliano Zapata, who is also the paladin of the Maya rebels, was, himself, a mestizo, not an Indian. Who are Sub-Comandante Marcos and the martyred Coronela Janina, but incarnations of the enemy? Where are the Maya gods, heroes and leaders in this Maya insurrection?

I have attempted to comprehend a very similar pattern among the

contemporary Tzotzils. I was concerned with this very paradox: Why should one of the most demographically significant, politically self-confident, and ethnically conservative Indian communities in Mexico live in the very center of a cosmos populated by white-skinned deities and adversaries and black-skinned demons and life forces? Where is the 'Indian' in their cosmological, spiritual, and historical landscape? After all, Chamulas are, by their own self-identification, "*the true people.*"

On examining Chamula oral historical accounts sacred narratives, and ritual practice, I found that virtually all beings, human and supernatural, who have influenced their lives and destiny in major ways are not 'ethnic Indians' at all. Their principal deities—the Sun/Christ, Moon/Virgin Mary, and the saints—appear, both iconographically and poetically, as 'white.' Their major historical allies, such as Miguel Hidalgo (the traditional father of the Mexican Independence Movement from Spain) and Erasto Urbina (a pro-Indian local hero), are classified as Ladinos, bearers of Mexican national culture. Earth lords, who are cast as both *good* (bringers of rain, agrarian fertility, and other forms of wealth, such as money) and bad (sources of bondage and slavery), are also ethnically Ladino. So is Saint Jerome, the keeper and patron of people's animal soul companions. Major historical adversaries, such as Mexican and Guatemalan soldiers, are cast as white. Furthermore, Tzotzils unambiguously associate white soldiers with predatory and antisocial behavior through their word for the common Norway rat: *caransa*, after Mexican Revolutionary 'hero' Venustiano Carranza. However, La Malinche herself, known by all Mexicans as the Indian mistress of Cortez, appears as a *ladina* campfollower of Ladino soldiers in Chamula ritual drama. Known as Nana María Cocorina, she wears a Ladino wedding dress and is ritually addressed as *xinulan antz*, 'stinking Ladino woman.'

Black-skinned characters also figure prominently in the creation of, and threats to, Chamula life, destiny, and identity. For example, the black demon Pukuh taught the first people to reproduce and to enjoy sex, just as he is said, even in our time, to make shady deals in which Indians exchange their loyalty and labor for wealth. Furthermore, these demons have been around for a long time: they and their monkey associates, also black, preceded human life itself in the time before the Moon and the Sun acted to create the First World. Thus, the non-Indian Other appears to be a necessary precondition for collective identity within the Chamula pattern of historical memory and being in the present.⁸

A close examination of the *Popol Vuh* reveals that the ancient Quiché themselves linked their own political legitimacy to an ancient, powerful eastern city state, known in legend as Tolán or Tulán, which, in terms of the ethnic identity of its inhabitants, was unlike the Quiché kingdom itself. In fact, it is represented as an imperial polity to which their own ancestors once paid tribute. There are at least a dozen surviving place names in Mesoamerica that bear names related to Tulán or Tolán, and most of them in fact lie outside the Maya area. The most

famous of these is Tula Hidalgo, an early post-Classic site in the Central Valley of Mexico. This was the seat of the Toltec kingdom (non-Maya-speaking) and home of the legendary god/king Topilzin Quetzalcóatl, who was associated with arts, learning, peace and prosperity. According to legends current at the time of contact and even into our time, he is said to have fled into the Eastern Sea at the time of his defeat 987 A.D. and the fall of Tula at the hand of the god of destruction and war. From the tenth century onward, Topilzin Quetzalcóatl was remembered in legend as a messiah who would one day return from the eastern sea to bring a new period of peace and prosperity to the entire region. In a recent, poignant testimony (1993) from one of the last surviving veterans of the Mexican Revolution, this ancient man from a village in Morelos said that Zapata had not died in 1919, but that he had, like Quetzalcóatl, gone off to the east (to Arabia) to return one day to help his people.⁹ Such commentary is reportedly heard these days in Chiapas as well. It is highly likely that the Quiché narrators of the *Popol Vuh* were aware of this same tradition, and found it plausible to tie their own political aspirations and legitimacy to this foreign god/king (the plumed serpent, presumed to be Topilzin Quetzalcóatl's co-essence, the source of his legendary power, is in fact often mentioned in the *Popol Vuh*) and to the power of a distant polity that was not Maya at all.

My point is simple. Maya ethnicity, cosmology, historical reckoning and political legitimacy have always drawn freely from symbolic and ideological forms of other ethnic and political entities—particularly those perceived to be stronger than themselves—in order to situate and center themselves in the present. Therefore, what I have identified above as the apparently anomalous and peculiar link of the Zapatistas to foreign alliances and symbolic affiliations—including Marcos, white foreign martyrs, the paladin of Zapata and the Mexican Revolutionary ideology that he embodies—is not at all strange to the Maya imagination. In fact, such alliances appear to have been a centrally important strategy for Maya cultural affirmation and political legitimacy since well before the contact period.

Zapata and Marcos in the World of the Sun

I have sketched above three fundamentally Maya ideas about the nature of reality and of the place of individuals and groups within the cosmos. Briefly summarized, these are:

- a. that reality is opaque; what can be experienced by human perception is seldom the whole picture of what is actually going on; hence, trusted interpreters and leaders are indispensable;
- b. that the destiny of the individual self is always linked to extrasomatic forces that are beyond one's direct control; therefore, the exercise of free will and acting only in one's own self interest are probably doomed to failure;
- c. that expressions of Maya collective identity, such as community

membership and ethnic affirmation, depend heavily on concrete and symbolic acknowledgment, even inclusion of, other identities, in order to situate themselves in an ever-evolving present; the idea of a pure lineage of Maya identity is, I believe, foreign to the way Maya people have thought and acted in history.

What do all of these principles share? Quite simply, they encourage actors to account for and act sensibly in relation to their own moral community and 'selves' by moving beyond themselves. Neither self, nor society, nor reality itself can be understood by focusing only on what is local, tangible and immediately accessible to the senses.

In a rather surreal manner, all of these traditional Maya, also Mesoamerican, ideas about self and destiny came together in the odd configuration what was witnessed by hundreds of millions around the world in February, 1994, at the Cathedral of San Cristóbal de las Casas on the occasion of peace negotiations with the Mexican government. Subcomandante Marcos, ski-masked, flanked by members of the secret Indian directorate, also masked, met the negotiating team from the Mexican government and the international press to register a list of demands that ranged from nation-wide electoral reforms, to educational reforms (including a public school curriculum that would ideally acknowledge Mexico's 10,000,000-strong Indian minorities), to land reform, to a charter of women's rights. Why should a blond, European, cosmopolitan Subcomandante Marcos preside over this extraordinary forum on behalf of Indian leaders, male and female, representing at least five of the major linguistic and ethnic groups in the state?. Why was there no 'Indian leader.'

Some part of the answer, I believe, lies in the content of this essay. Sub-comandante Marcos is utterly plausible as a spokesperson for an Indian cause precisely because he is outside of, extra-somatic to, the Indian community. This 'other world' of destiny that is symbolized by Marcos (perhaps also by the emblematic memory of Zapata himself) is one of the several non-Indian places from which co-essential power and causation in the Maya universe emanate from to start with, be it for individuals or for groups.

The masked, incognito mode of self-representation of the parties in these events cannot be dismissed as guerrilla theatre, nor merely understood as a military security measure. It is, rather, a logical strategy of caution in the arena of instrumentality (read 'revolutionary change') whose goals are not yet achieved and whose benefits to the larger Indian community are not yet manifest. Thus, individual identities had best be masked, lest the leaders be accused of self-aggrandizement and self-gain. If they were so perceived by others—without solid evidence for the overriding legitimacy of their exercise of power—they could easily become potential targets for malevolent supernatural action, as in the casting of sickness, as discussed above. It is perhaps also for these reasons that the members of the Indian directorate of the Zapatista Movement have opted for a secret lateral organization of co-equals

rather than a hierarchical chain of authority. If the unusual unfolding of the Zapatista Movement can be partially understood within the matrix of ancient Mesoamerican ideas about self and society, I think these events have another quality that represent something relatively new if not utterly revolutionary in the modern era. I refer to the pan-Indian composition of the leadership and constituency of the Zapatistas.

Only on rare occasion in colonial and modern Chiapas history (notably, the Tzeltal Rebellion of 1712 and the War of Santa Rosa in 1867-1870; see some preceding chapters) have Indian political and religious movements in Chiapas crossed ethnic and linguistic lines in terms of their constituencies and military mobilization; and when they have done so in such a manner as to become active and visible, these movements have been promptly crushed by the state. Indeed, the Spanish Crown created administrative institutions, settlement patterns and local civil and religious organization that would, in effect segregate Indians from Spanish and mestizo communities and also from one another. In functioning to encourage local identities, languages, customs and loyalties, these policies served the Crown's purpose in that they discouraged pan-Indian opposition to state policy. In many respects, this configuration of ethnically and demographically isolated Indian townships that are indirectly controlled by the state through the *cacique* system has continued largely intact well into the late twentieth century, and is particularly characteristic of municipios in Highland Chiapas and Highland Guatemala.

However, the demographic portrait of the region that spawned the Zapatista Movement is *unlike* what I have just described, and this dissimilarity matters a great deal in making sense of the background of the rebellion. The Zapatista homeland, in the Lacandon jungle lowlands of Chiapas, is actually a pioneer settlement area. Within the last few decades, tens of thousands of displaced individuals have emigrated there as refugees from poverty and political and religious persecution in their Indian townships of origin. The region is also home to thousands of Guatemalan Maya refugees who fled there to escape political violence in their own country. The region therefore has no established social order that is dominated by any one Maya ethnic or linguistic group. This is also a region of great religious diversity, comprised of thousands of newly converted Protestants and recently evangelized 'progressive' Catholics who were, over the last two decades, the subjects of intense proselytizing by lay catechysts and priests who were associated with Liberation Theology. There are, no doubt, also 'traditional Mayas' who do not feel attracted to either Protestant or liberal Catholic teachings.

It is therefore not surprising that the composition of EZLN, although generally Maya, is actually fairly diverse in terms of ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds that are represented. Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Zoque, Chol, and Tojolabal speakers, as well as Mexican mestizos and ethnically 'white' Mexicans, are all united in pursuit of common political and social goals. What is Maya about the Zapatista movement must therefore

be sought not in particular variants of Maya cultural identity, but rather, in general principles of values and conduct that all might share, be they Tzotzil or Zoques. This common ground is what I have tried to identify in this essay.

While the immediate goals of the Maya Zapatistas appear to be primarily of an economic and political nature to outside observers, I believe that the pan-Maya nature of this enterprise has a powerful component of post-colonial ethnic affirmation that goes well beyond political action. Any serious observer of modern Guatemala, Chiapas or Yucatan will be aware that well-organized pan-Maya cooperation now extends into many arenas of activity. The nature of these pan-Indian groups ranges from intellectual, educational and religious organizations to crafts guilds (for example, textile and ceramic cooperatives) catering to the tourist and export trade. There are also numerous writers' and artists' cooperatives whose members are working even as we speak to create a corpus of literature in Maya languages, as well as graphic and performing arts that express the traditional and contemporary Maya themes. Guatemala is moving, even as we speak today, to the creation of a parallel Indian education system, designed by the Mayas themselves (*Centro de Estudios de la Cultura Maya*), that recognizes, perhaps grudgingly on the part of the government, that literacy in Indian languages is in the national interest. Certainly, Mexico cannot be far behind.

The governments of both countries now realize that the pan-Indian voice in these *de facto* multicultural nations is here to stay. Governments can no longer crush this voice with military action or buy it off with conciliatory 'things' alone. They must enter into dialogue with it and add the contemporary Indian voice to the national idea. There is evidence, therefore, that Mesoamerica's 'collective Indian soul' has already emerged in the late twentieth century as an active and public voice in the modern nations of the region. And, most important, the Indian voice is commanding a broadly based respect in the national communities of both Mexico and Guatemala that has not been known for 450 years. The Zapatista Movement is part of this pattern of increasingly honest dialogue between mestizo and Indian sectors of these nations.¹⁰ Therefore, the Comandante of Sub-Comandante Marcos is surely none other than the emerging collective soul of the modern Maya as full participants in a multi-cultural Mexican nation.

Endnotes

1. Although analytical literature on the Zapatista Movement is just beginning to appear. The following are major works and collections of essays on the subject: George Collier's (with Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello) monograph, *Basta!; Cultural Survival Quarterly's* Volume 18:1, which contains eight essays on various aspects of the Zapatista Movement by anthropologists and historians who have worked in the region for many years; and the Summer, 1994, number of the *Akwé:kon: Journal of Indigenous Issues*, which is entirely devoted to the Zapatista Movement.

2. Tedlock, *Breath on the Mirror*, pp. 166-167.

3. Originally published in Spanish in *La Jornada*, Sunday, February 27, 1994, p. 11; translated into English by Ron Nigh, "Zapata Rose in 1994," p. 12.

4. See Gossen, "From Olmecs to Zapatistas."

5. Justeson and Kaufman, "Decipherment," p. 1703.

6. Houston and Stuart, *Way Glyph*, p. 13.

7. Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, pp. 18-20.

8. On this, see Gossen, "Other in Chamula Tzotzil Cosmology."

9. Lloyd, "Last Zapata," p. 11.

10. As I complete the final draft of this essay in mid-March, 1995, Chiapas once again edges to the brink of civil war, as wealthy ranchers and farmers blame the Zapatistas and their supporters for destroying the status quo. Mexico itself finds itself in the midst of a catastrophic political and economic crisis that is shaking the nation to its very Revolutionary foundations. Although the army has driven the Zapatistas from their jungle stronghold and Marcos is currently in hiding, they remain almost larger than life in Mexican political discourse; the government does not dare destroy them outright; indeed, an amnesty offer is currently on the table. The Zapatistas' symbolic capital remains strong, so strong that they are being credited with everything from directly precipitating the current national crisis to being a key symptom of what was wrong to start with. Either way, their place in twentieth century Mexican history seems secure.