

The “madness” of Marcos

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Radio UNAM launched the series “Chiapas, Open File” on January 13. The work team, made up of Oscar Oliva, David Vázquez and myself, travelled to Chiapas from March 11 to 19 to interview some of those involved in the conflict. We spent six days in the Lacandon Jungle, where we talked to members of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation’s Clandestine Revolutionary Indian Committee. Subcomandante Marcos made a special effort to address the university radio, and we interviewed him three times, for a total of four and a half hours. Excerpts from the conversation are given below.

- What were the twelve books you brought to the Lacandon Jungle?
- Pablo Neruda’s *Canto general* (General Song), a selection of poems by Miguel Hernández and León Felipe, Julio Cortázar’s *Historia de cronopios y famas* (History of Cronopios and Fame), *Las memorias de Pancho Villa* (The Memoirs of Pancho Villa) by Martín Luis Guzmán and *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. I can’t remember the others.
- What made you choose those books?
- I didn’t really think about it too much. I was told, “You’re going to leave, get your things ready.” I packed some clothes and grabbed the books I had nearest to hand, because they were the ones I read or consulted most often. There were others, but I left those behind. So I threw the books into my bag and brought them with me into the jungle. I left them in the

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The EZLN taught the country dignity.

“mailboxes” that are like little storehouses we have in the jungle to keep the things we don’t use every day; every so often we go along to check or pick something up. So I used to leave some books there and pick others up, and then I used to swap them around. And that went on for quite a while.

- Do you still have any of that poetry with you today? Do you remember it? Has it given you courage or inspired you?
- What a funny way to start an interview! I particularly recall *Don Quixote* when he ends up saying, “I was sane, I was mad, now I’m sane again” and how, in spite of this, *Quixote* is remembered for his madness. The defeat of madness and the imposition of good sense and

prudence is the saddest part of this book. Yet despite this, people always remember the crazy heroic actions in *Don Quixote*, not the part where he returns to normal life and slips back into conformity. That is what other people and I want to avoid: reaching the point where we say we were crazy and that we will regain our senses again. We think we should hang on to this madness, until the very end.

- And what were your windmills?
- The Mexican Army’s helicopters, which are not exactly windmills and not exactly fictional objects. The Pilatus planes Switzerland’s neutral government sold to Mexico for killing Indians. No, they were very real enemies and they’re still very real. And we obviously used something a little stronger than lances to defend ourselves.

- What became of your generation?
- Fortunately, none of them has a high post in the government or in the Secretariats of State. I think that, in different ways, they have continued to be consistent with their beliefs and what they want to do, or their life plans. It is very satisfying not to find any acquaintances among this country’s great personalities, because they’re the ones who are going to fall very soon. It is also satisfying to know that this other generation, not the generation of change, but the generation of dignity, are the ones who are going to straighten out this country. My generation hasn’t sold out. And it’s not a question of going to the mountains, as we did, but of being consistent with a certain way of thinking. I salute that generation—my generation—for not writing “I was crazy, now I’m sane” and then

knuckling under to the state, to conformity and the intellectual or power elites. I salute their anonymity and raise my ski mask to them. In the final analysis, everyone wears his own ski mask.

- What has the jungle taught you?
- To cultivate hope. The mountain fans the flames of hope, and doesn't let its light go out. That's the fire we lit on January 1 and took to the town halls. There is so much darkness in this country that the little flame we carried gave off a lot of light.
- You gained hope in the jungle; what did you leave behind in the city?
- A subway ticket, a pile of books, a broken pencil and a notebook full of poetry—nothing more. I don't think I left anything else.
- Any friends?
- Quite a few stayed behind.
- Any dead?
- No more than necessary. Sometimes you just need one, sometimes you need more. But no more than that, just the number of dead needed to understand that we had to leave so we could come back different. This time we would come back with no face, name or past, but we would come back for those who had died.
- Do you ever imagine your own death?
- No, I don't want to die. We make the distinction between wanting to die and being prepared to die. People say that the Zapatistas are obsessed with death. It's easy for those in the city to say we're obsessed with death. But the people who live in the jungle have worked out the figures financially showing that it's cheaper to die of a curable illness than to get better. Death plays a different sort of game for us.
- What were your thoughts on December 31?
- I wondered whether the troops would gather. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation is made up of volunteers. It is not enough to say

you're going to take the cities. If the troops aren't convinced of what they're going to do, they won't go. That was the gamble—although obviously, deep down, I felt that people would come out and fight with us. Because we had prepared a plan of attack with a certain number of troops and arms. But what if they didn't...? That was my greatest doubt until midnight on December 31. Then I realized we had more troops than we had estimated. Besides, this situation meant a radical change for us. We had spent ten years preparing for this moment.

- What has the EZLN taught the country?
- Dignity. We really insisted on this, because it is a fallacy that Mexicans put up with anything and you can do anything to them and they won't say anything. That's all over. It's no longer as improbable or unlikely to think of a democratic change in our country. But that hope is born of people saying "We've had enough!" That is the lesson taught by those with the least culture, who are the most isolated and have the smallest share in the country. It is a lesson in shame, which the Indians have taught the rest of the country.

- Why has the Mexican government found it so easy to doubt the Zapatista Army's authenticity?

- Because the only way to back up your own hypocrisy is to look for it in others. There is also a tendency to adopt a European anthropological criterion that doubts the Indians' abilities. They say that Indians are incapable of having a sense of national awareness, cannot be concerned about the lack of democracy and are unintelligent. State intellectuals are the ones who doubt the EZLN's authenticity and wonder whether we are being financed by some faction of the government or by foreigners. But these doubts don't affect us. We are betting on the peasants, students and housewives, those who have nothing and who are eventually going to sway the balance. They don't ask where we come from but where we're going. They want to look us straight in the eyes, ski masks and all.

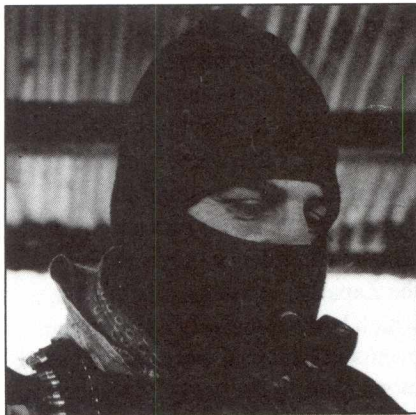
- Why have you been asked to remove your ski mask?

- The government has to strike somehow. They think I'm hiding my face, not because I'm honest or because I really don't want to be a *caudillo*, but because I'm hiding something from my past. So they want



Subcomandante Marcos made a special effort to address the university radio.

Joaquín Fuentes.



I hide my face because I don't want to be a caudillo.

to destroy the myth of Marcos, just as they wanted to destroy the myth of poverty. Sometimes I make a joke that when they learn who I am and find out about my background and *résumé*, they're going to ask me to keep my ski mask on.

- What have been the EZLN's greatest successes?
- Managing to convince the country of three things: that the movement is Mexican; that the reasons behind our uprising are just—in other words, we're not involved with drug trafficking or one government sector trying to go after another; and that our demands are national, not local.
- What about the EZLN's failures?
- We've had some military failures. For us, having people die when it could have been avoided constitutes a military failure. In Ocosingo and Rancho Nuevo we made mistakes that we paid for with our *compañeros'* lives. In the retreats at Altamirano and Las Margaritas we also made mistakes that led to the deaths of some Zapatistas and the imprisonment of others. Our political failure lay in not foreseeing clearly enough that we would move quickly from the military to the political stage. We calculated that this stage would take a long time; our initial reaction was hesitant and we lost a sense of balance in some aspects. We were not prepared.
- Does the EZLN now intend to have a political arm?

- As I said, we had originally thought there would be a long war. The Clandestine Revolutionary Indian Committee is analyzing the possibility, but we haven't given it much thought because the signals we're picking up are war signals, not ones that give priority to politics. The government has gone on kidnapping, assassinating and carrying out provocations.
- Some analysts fear a *coup d'état*. Do you think that is a possible scenario?
- Yes, certainly. But it would be counterproductive for the system itself. A *coup d'état* could not be sustained for long, given the current political effervescence.
- So would a transition government be closer?
- If only it were! If only it were. If a transition government is not close, then what is going to be close is a civil war. I can't see any other way to solve

the problems, not only in Chiapas but all over the country. A transition government could emerge on August 21. That would seem to be the most logical option.

- What would be the risks if the government only accepted the Zapatistas' demands in the Chiapas area and not for the rest of the country?
- That the peace talks would fail. The problem is that the government thinks, as some sectors of the media do, that it is dealing with a force that has only taken up arms because of immediate demands. We are not going to relinquish national demands, however attractive local concessions may be. We are militarily a local army, in appearance, but one whose will, demands and aspirations are national—even though we are holed up in the jungle. We don't want anything for ourselves, we want everything for everyone. ✪



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economía

COMPETENCIA Y CRISIS EN LA ECONOMÍA MEXICANA

Etelberto ORTÍZ

Este trabajo permite un cuestionamiento sobre los diversos enfoques que se han realizado acerca de la crisis en México. El autor ofrece así una vinculación esencial entre las teorías de la competencia y de la crisis formuladas por Marx, que hoy en día es necesario revisar para desarrollar una nueva capacidad de respuesta frente a los embates del neoliberalismo, que se identifica si se piensa en "El capital" de Marx, como un proceso de investigación inconcluso que requiere de trabajo fresco.

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