Poetics of Indigenismo in Zapatista Discourse

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The Mexican Revolution Revisioned through Mayan Eyes

By

Gregory K. Stephens

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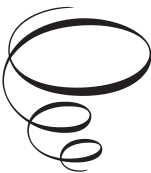

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ABSTRACT

This book repositions Marcos' writings/Zapatista discourse as literary texts. Moving beyond the political content on which most commentators have focused, the book illuminates why these "indigenous" writings have garnered acclaim from literary elites. Three components of neo-Zapatista discourse are analyzed: the poetics of indigenismo; the role of Zapatista mythopoetics in re-imagining the nature of revolutions; and a unique variant of globalizing translation: how a native subculture and cosmovision were made intelligible to an international audience. The study begins with an examination of how the legacy of Emiliano Zapata was translated into terms comprehensible to Mayan peoples in Chiapas. Close readings of a group of stories, essays and communiques by Subcomandante Marcos explore the emergence of a thoroughly hybrid literary style. These texts are analyzed in relation to existing genres such Native American literature, environmental literature, and the literature of the Mexican revolution. Students, scholars, and political activists will find this book of interest. The book shows that, while Marcos employs the iconography of Che, Zapata, et. al, and in some ways furthers the "romance of revolution" for an electronically networked world, he has also popularized on an international stage the post-Cold War aspiration to "change the world without taking power."

PREFACE

MASKED, ENMESHED, BY LITERATURE BLESSED

This book was first written in 2007-08 as a thesis at the University of the West Indies-Mona. The MPhil in Spanish Literature I earned while in Jamaica was done concurrently with my work as a Lecturer in Cultural Studies and Film at UWI. Now in early 2019, I draw on two classes I am teaching in Puerto Rico, "Ethnographic Fiction and Faction," and a seminar in Literary Nonfiction, for assistance in reframing this book.[1]

While in Kingston, I had decided that Subcomandante Marcos' moment as a political figure had passed. His initial fame was as a *masked icon of resistance*. However, Marcos was held in high esteem by many literary elites from the time he burst into public consciousness in 1994. As translator/spokesman for the culture of Mayan peoples, Marcos had produced a body of writing that could endure, I thought.

My approach to Marcos's *literary texts* is shaped by my work in literary nonfiction and ethnography. Cultural context is essential to both. In my nonfiction seminar, we study authors including George Orwell, whose experiences as a British policeman in southeast Asia, and in the Spanish Civil War, had formative influences on him. My own experiences as a songwriter, post-racialist spokesman, and long residency in the Southwest and in the Caribbean, also had a formative influence on me.[2]

Re-examining this manuscript now, while studying the border between ethnography and literature, its several layers as an artifact become visible. I was trying to carve out space for "ethnographic approaches" in my own teaching, writing, and scholarship. My entry into English as a discipline in 2004 was a sometimes bumpy ride.[3] I always trusted my own instincts more than whatever intellectual

fashions were dominant in the academic world, it is safe to say. Those instincts were *ethnographic*, *communicative*, and when I could manage it while doing battle with editors, *literary*.

Marcos's trajectory, especially his reception by adoring or hostile publics, has some similarities with the career of Carlos Castaneda, it strikes me now. We perhaps trod the turf here of the "sins of one's youth." But I couldn't teach a class about the contested interface between literature and ethnography without including *The Teachings of Don Juan*, it seemed to me. Should I mask my youthful enthusiasm for Castaneda's books? In retrospect, a cultural hunger for Indian shamans or spiritual teachers was widespread, and persists. I read Richard DeMille's debunking of Castaneda when it was published, taking it as accurate.[4] But a generation passed and another mestizo "Indian spokesman" came on the scene, Marcos in 1994. Both took care to "erase personal history," as Castaneda put it, although in the case of Marcos, reporters could go and talk with the Mayans he lived with and worked "for."

Other parallels are worth bearing in mind. In "The imposter as trickster as innovator," Stefan Löchle claims that "Don Juan Matus," albeit fictional, "is given a prominence that no Native informant was granted before." That can be argued, but the following point seems valid: "it is the Native who is constantly in control of the situation, and who frequently ridicules the western scientist for being entrapped in a one-dimensional and limiting view of the world."[5]

I see that dynamic as something of a template for Marcos' reverse conversion. Marcos left an academic career in Mexico City and went to the jungles of Chiapas, intending to convert the Mayans to his version of a Maoist revolution. Instead, the Indians converted Marcos. He became a spokesman, but more especially a translator for their cultural world view. Those translations by Marcos fit loosely within the "ethnographic fiction and faction" domain--or at least they emerged on a border between literature and ethnography.

Some of the seeds for my thesis and now book about Zapatista poetics were a series of events supporting the Zapatistas, held in Berkeley California during the late 1990s. I remember a screening of Nettie Wild's film *A Place Called Chiapas*. The foyer was full of things for sale, such as a doll of the masked Marcos made by Mayans. Marcos' interview with Wild makes his experience seem quite

ethnographic in the beginning, in the sense of a complete immersion in the lifestyle of his Mayan hosts.

Seen with dispassionate distance, I cannot deny that my enthusiasm for Marcos and the Zapatistas followed a template that was shaped, or pre-structured, by my reading of Castaneda in the mid-to-late 1970s. This leads to a self-reflexive question: can we admit to the "sins of our youth," and even more, be willing to profess that these "sins" had some positive value? The tendency of anthropologists to ignore Castaneda, after some had initially publicly endorsed him, shows just how touchy this issue can be. The University of California Press still publishes *The Teachings of Don Juan* as non-fiction, and Castaneda received his PhD in Anthropology from the University of California-Los Angeles for his third book, *Journey to Ixtlan*. At least *Teachings* had a "Structural Analysis," a thin pretense of social science wrapping, which Joyce Carol Oates recognized as a "merciless parody" of academic writing.[6] But *Ixtlan* was sheer allegory, with no citations or theoretical concerns, at least in a scholarly sense.

Castaneda popularized anthropology for a generation, becoming a "culture hero" (as did Marcos later). Castaneda was responsible for many an anthropology major, including Jay Fikes, who later became one of the author's most trenchant critics.[7] Having hoodwinked Anthropology was unforgiveable. But if Castaneda was a con artist, he was just one in a long series, including most recently the "Grievance Studies" hoax.

Having witnessed a partial "return of the repressed" literary aspirations in ethnography, I wonder: what sorts of babies get thrown out with the bathwater? If the passion for Castaneda (or Marcos) was a sin of youth, then was religious expression also a youthful sin? Was romanticizing Indians so very different from Margaret Mead romanticizing Samoans? Mead played with the children instead of sitting at the feet of the elders, and wrote up her findings in fine literary style, with no scholarly apparatus. My students seem to agree that she learned more of value from the girls. "What has been hidden from the wise and the prudent is revealed to the babe and the suckling."[8]

Although Marcos added fuel to the "romance of resistance," it was the literary output which could endure, I became convinced. So

we find ourselves in the realm of creation stories, which Marcos used often. Are those also a sin of youth? I had my own thoughts about how a singer / speaker's mask or skin color changed her reception. Long before I went to Jamaica, the Biblical praise songs which left me cold in the churches of my youth lit a fire in my soul, when sung by Rastafarians. Marcos may have looked like a white man without the mask, but masked, sucking on his pipe, draped in ammunition, he could trade in "Native" spirituality and secular leftists sang hosannas back to him. The mask and his Mayan cohort made new vision possible for his audience, it seems.

In Jamaica I was also trying to define my own disciplinary affiliation. I migrated from Communication to English in 2004, and have remained an outsider in large part. From then on, I have made the border between ethnography and fiction (or between fiction and faction) a home base.

Reading Ruth Behar's *The Vulnerable Observer*, I found passages that shed light on my intuition of a performative kinship between Castaneda and Marcos. She quotes Clifford Geertz, regarding what happens to ethnographers seeking to understand another culture:

> You don't exactly penetrate another culture, as the masculinist image would have it. You put yourself in its way and it bodies forth and enmeshes itself in you.[9]

This reversal of role of the ethnographer, wherein one is "enmeshed," and gives up all pretense of *penetrating*, is certainly characteristic of Castaneda, even in fictional/ factional guise. And it is at the heart of the story that Marcos tells us about his experience among the Mayans.

Geertz embraced "the cause of subjectivity with only half a heart," Behar remarks.[10] As a professional ethnographer, how could he give his whole heart? What then of Castaneda's myth to live by, that of a "path with heart" pursued by a "man of knowledge"? Doesn't that in fact match rather closely how Marcos described being reborn among the Mayans?

I may wince now at how full of meaning that notion of a "path with heart" was for me as a young man. But does disavowal erase the underlying "structure of feeling," on which the *path with heart* struck

such a resounding chord?[11] Both Castaneda and Marcos could have stayed in the academic world, and played by its rules. Yet they left and sought out something new. For Marcos, that was a real-life version of what Castaneda seems to have glimpsed, and then fictionalized. Marcos full-heartedly embraced a path in which his subject position was always secondary, since he was, by definition, a servant of his Mayan cohort.

At the start of Behar's Acknowledgments, she credits a colleague with "the faith given me," because this friend "encouraged me to believe that these essays might be creative writing."[11] *A faith!* One must believe that one can integrate enough of a literary style to transcend mere scholarship, and give voice to that *new language* which is invariably a testimony to having been penetrated, "enmeshed," transfigured by another culture.

Notes

1. "The Poetics of Indigenismo in Zapatista Discourse: Revisioning the Mexican Revolution through Mayan Eyes," MPhil thesis, University of the West Indies-Mona, 2008. I have added Spanish translations for this book.
2. Gregory Stephens, *On Racial Frontiers: The "New Culture" of Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, and Bob Marley* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); "Integrative Ancestors redux--A Child's story from the past to the future," *Dreamers Creative Writing* (October 2018).
3. See the Section One introduction of my *Trilogies as Cultural Analysis: Literary Re-imaginings of Sea Crossings, Animals, and Fathering* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2018). I distinguish between taking an "ethnographic approach," and claiming to "do ethnography" proper. David Barton, "Ethnographic approaches to literacy research," *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* (2012); and Brian Paltridge's comments in Ann Johns, et al., "Crossing the boundaries of genre studies: Commentaries by experts," *Journal of second language writing* 15.3 (2006): 234-49. People from many disciplines, or outside of academic research, can utilize an "ethnographic imagination" without encroaching on Anthropology's sometimes territorial claims to ethnography. Paul Atkinson, *The ethnographic imagination: Textual constructions of reality* (Routledge, 2014).
4. Richard De Mille, *Castaneda's Journey: The Power and the Allegory* (Capra Press, 1976).

5. Stefan Löchle, “The imposter as trickster as innovator: a re-reading of Carlos Castaneda’s *Don Juan cycle*,” In *Fake identity? The impostor narrative in North American culture,* ed. Caroline Rosenthal and Stefanie Schäfer (New York: Campus Verlag, 2014): 81-96 (94).
6. De Mille, *Castaneda’s Journey*, 72.
7. Jay Courtney Fikes, *Carlos Castaneda, academic opportunism and the psychedelic sixties* (Victoria: Millenia Press, 1993). In 1966, Susan Sontag observed the phenomenon of “the anthropologist as hero.” Qt. in Barbara Tedlock, “From participant observation to the observation of participation: the emergence of narrative ethnography,” *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 47.1 (1991): 69-94 (75).
8. Matthew 11:25. The paraphrasing here is from Bob Marley’s song “Forever Loving Jah.”
9. Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Harvard UP, 1995): 5.
10. Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart* (Boston: Beacon, 1996): 8.
11. Raymond Williams, “Structures of Feeling,” *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford UP, 1977): 128-35; *The Long Revolution* (London, Chatto & Windus), 1961. My discussions of using “structure of feeling” in cultural analysis, and in writing instruction: Gregory Stephens, “Three Birds Sing a New Song: A Puerto Rican trilogy about Dystopia, Precarity, & Resistance” (*Intermezzo*, 2019), and “Beyond the Romance of Resistance: Translating Stuart Hall, and Re-imagining Cultural Analysis,” *Culture in Focus* (Spring 2018).
12. Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer*, xi.

INTRODUCTION

"Queremos que sepan quién...nuestro corazón domina…Es y no es en estas tierras: Votán Zapata, guardián y corazón del pueblo." [1]

"We want you to know who is behind us and who rules our hearts; he both is and is not from these lands: Votán Zapata, guardian and heart of the people."[1]

(El comité Clandestino Revolutionario Indígena-Comandancia General del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, 10 de abril de 1994)

This book analyzes the indigenous or quasi-indigenous components of neo-Zapatista discourse in México, from 1994 to about 2005. I concentrate on a group of stories, essays and communiques that explain, in a self-consciously literary manner, how the legacy of Emiliano Zapata was translated into terms comprehensible to Mayan peoples of the state of Chiapas. This study proposes, in broadest terms, to treat the writings of Subcomandante Marcos as literary texts worthy of study as such—that is, to locate them within the domain of Mexican literature, and to evaluate them with the tools of literary analysis, rather than treate them as political artefacts, as most studies of Marcos and the Zapatistas have done. Within that rubric, there are three inter-related foci.

1) I explore the Zapatista variant of the *poetics of indigenismo*, an often highly stylised, ritualistic discourse by and about indigenous peoples in México, or more broadly, the Americas.
2) I ask to what degree Zapatista mythopoetics, as a poetic-political discourse, has succeeded in *re-imagining* the nature of *revolution*.

3) I analyze various levels of *translation* involved in Zapatista discourse.

Michelle Bigenho describes indigenismo as "cultural discourses through which Latin American Creoles and mestizos reflected on the position of indigenous populations in their countries. These reflections often became part of regional identity claims and nation-building projects." In the early 20th century, this phenomenon was found across most of Latin America, but it was particularly well-developed in Mexico. In political terms it was a repudiation of 19th century ethnocentric evolutionism, which proposed to assimilate indigenous groups into the nation-state. This process of assimilation, notes Hector Diaz-Polanco, "expressly implied the abandonment on the part of the natives of all their cultural features, which were visualized negatively as responsible for the 'backward' degree of development in which they were found." As an alternative, multi-centered view of nation and identity, the most influential forms of indigenismo came from artistic expression, as with Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, and in literature, notably in the fiction of Nobel-prize winning Guatemalan novelist Miguel Ángel Asturias. In *Hombres de maíz* (1949), Asturias stressed "the need not so much to integrate Maya populations into the nation state as positively to respect their culture and language in their own right," René Prieto has argued. Prieto sees in *Hombres de maíz* a literary parallel for the political scheme at that time of President Arévalo: "the Maya would not be collectivized but encouraged to develop socially within the framework of their own culture." Asturias' translation into literature of a cultural valoration of indigenous cultures, as part of an emerging rejection of Eurocentric definitions of political and cultural identity in the Americas, provides a template for the poetics of indigenismo that Subcomandante Marcos would undertake with the neo-Zapatistas.[2]

My study of translation (and of transfigurations) centers on how the myth of Zapata as a quasi-messianic revolutionary was revisioned through indigenous eyes. Translating the Mexican revolution into a language capable of expressing the aspirations of an indigenous constituency in México raises broader questions of translation. How has this "indigenous" discourse been framed in

such a way as to attract an international support group? What is the literary quality of this discourse that has elicited the praise of a broad range of literary elites around the world? To what degree does this translate into increased cultural, political, or economic autonomy?[3]

This book centers on an in-depth analysis of the means by which Marcos, through consultation with the Mayan peoples of Chiapas, has re-visioned the Mexican revolution specifically through a translation of the legacy of Emiliano Zapata into indigenous terms.

But I want to begin by unpacking the opening epigraph. This quote expresses or implies in condensed form all the central themes I want to explore. Most centrally, it indicates that the heart of the Mexican people is indigenous, and that this indigenous heart has re-appeared as a fusion of the legacy of Emiliano Zapata and of Mayan myths. It also calls attention to the visual, linguistic, and ideological hybridity of the Zapatista spokesman, Subcomandante Marcos. As readers we are immediately confronted with a mestizo who, as Enrique Dussell has observed, "se ha convertido en un traductor cultural entre dos mundos, ha hecho comunicables dos mundos incomunicados." (As a cultural translator, he enabled communication between two previously incommunicable worlds).[4]

This notion of the *conversion* of a former urban intellectual into a new quasi-indigenous identity, who in a collective context has helped develop a style of communication capable of bridging previously incommensuarable worlds, is an inescapable focal point of my investigation. It is not an option to avoid the defining role that Marcos has played in giving public, and indeed international expression to the Zapatistas' claims to represent Mexico's "indigenous heart." This quote also confronts us immediately with the controversies and paradoxes that Marcos' presence has caused within the Mexican public sphere, in terms of the long-delayed entry of "indigenous discourse" into Mexican national politics.

Let us proceed to the immediate socio-cultural and political context of the above quote. "Subcomandante Marcos" is the *nom de guerre* of Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, a fair-skinned young university lecturer who relocated to the state of Chiapas in 1983-84 to foment resistance and revolution amongst the indigenous peoples there. The armed uprising through which the Zapatistas came to

international attention began on New Year's Day, 1994. Shortly after, Marcos was forced to respond to accusations that *los indígenas* had been manipulated, or brainwashed, by white intellectuals or leftists. "Como si los indios no fuesen capaces de pensar o de organizarse por su propia cuenta," as Guillermo Almeyra observes (as if the Indians weren't capable of thinking or organizing themselves on their own initiative).[5]

The response of the Zapatistas, through the mestizo spokesman Marcos, has three elements to which I want to call attention:

1) There is a declaration of loyalty, and more: "a quién somos súbiditos"—to whom we are subject, i.e., not to urban intellectuals, or political leaders, but to Votán Zapata.
2) The force capable of dominating Chiapas indígenas is not leftist ideology, nor the theology of liberation, nor any supposedly "authentic" indigenous culture, but a fusion of these three elements united with the legacy of Emiliano Zapata. The phrase "*Es y no es en estas tierras*" (is and is not in these lands) signals that Votán Zapata has been imported, and perhaps arrived with Marcos himself.
3) The Zapatistas represent, and have access to, "el corazón del pueblo" (the heart of the people); this is a translation of Zapata's legacy, or Zapata with an indigenous mask. This is the central, indeed "dominating" image that resides in the most sacred place of this semi-indigenous heart.

The relation of text to context is a thorny problem to which I will have to return repeatedly. Since some readers may have little familiarity with Mexican history, before proceeding further, a brief overview of the political origins of the Zapatistas is in order.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEO-ZAPATISTAS: AN INTRODUCTORY SKETCH

The Zapatistas are a mostly Mayan movement of masked rebels who rose up in arms in Chiapas, Mexico on January 1, 1994—the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented. "Hijos de la rebelión y la resistencia" (Children of rebellion and resistance), they call themselves. They are figurative descendants of Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, as indicated by their name, as well as their slogans—"¡Democracia! ¡Libertad! ¡Justicia!" (Democracy! Liberty! Justice!) As such, as Manuel Castells insists, they are patriots and democrats. In a larger context, their rhetoric places them within the historical trajectory of the expanding culture of Equal Rights and Justice. This includes actors ranging from late-18th century British abolitionists to the 19th century women's suffrage movement, to 20th century Caribbean Rastafarians, to 21st century animal rights activists. The Zapatistas' innovative use of communication technologies has earned them sobriquets like "the first informational guerrilla movement," or "post-modern revolutionaries."[6] Their focus in the 21st century has been on the creation of autonomous communities. In the mountains of southeastern Mexico, the Zapatistas are attempting true democracy—government by and for the people—on a local scale, but on a global stage.

But the Zapatistas are also a field of discourse, a world-wide-web of words and images. A 2001 search found 45,000 Zapatista-related websites in 26 countries. The communiqués of the Zapatistas, primarily written by their spokesman Subcomandante Marcos, are available in at least 14 languages.[7] They are the subject of a large body of scholarship and testimonials. Like all modern iconic revolutionaries (Che Guevara, Bob Marley, etc.), their images are

reproduced by a cottage industry of visual representations, ranging from T-shirts and masked Mayan-made dolls, to postcards and videos.[8]

The Zapatistas have named what they fight *against* (their uprising is in present tense) in simplest terms as: "*el mal gobierno*"—first the corrupt government of Mexico, with "cerilla…en los oidos" (wax in its ears), incapable of dialogue. This is the "Babylon System" Bob Marley imagined, a vampire "sucking the blood of the sufferers," and "eating up all the flesh from off the earth."[9] Announcing this live and direct to an international audience (the revolution *was* televised) produced immediate results. Mass demonstrations by people who supported the Zapatistas' aims, but not violence, resulted in a cease-fire on January 12, 1994. But the Mexican government sent 60,000 troops to occupy the state of Chiapas. So the conflict was quickly nationalized and internationalized.

The Zapatistas have always expressed the view that the troops of *el mal gobierno* were following orders of people outside of Mexico. *El mal gobierno*, then, far from serving the interests of the Mexican people, actually fought to protect the interests of an international system of power whose only purpose, in the short term, is to protect and to expand the earnings of its investors.

The Zapatistas define their broader enemy as neo-liberalism, or "extreme capitalism," the shadow side of globalization Zapatistas believe will destroy them and the land they live on, if their rebellion remains localized.[10] So they also describe their uprising as "*la guerra contra el olvido*"—a war against being forgotten. *Su palabra*, or Word in the quasi-Biblical sense the Mayans use, reminds us that native peoples have their own philosophy and way of life that does not coincide with the goal of turning the world into a giant shopping mall.

What the Zapatistas fight *for* has come to center on recognition of their cultural and political autonomy, including the right to speak their own languages, and to control the natural resources on their land.

Their version of the politics of recognition has inspired a variety of *altermundistas*.[11] Respect for diversity of culture and lifestyle is a cornerstone of their two-word re-imagining of true democracy: "*mandar obedeciendo*." To govern by obeying means to follow the

will of the people. If the people speak a different language from their would-be leaders, then those who aspire to lead cannot govern without learning the languages of the people, and engaging them in on-going dialogue. That implies being prepared to change the style and substance of governance in a variety of ways. For the Zapatistas, the changes they most desire center on recognition of the rights of indigenous cultures, dignity, and respect for the mother earth, i.e. a sustainable way of life.

The Zapatistas' "true secret weapon" is their language.[12] From the beginning, the Zapatistas used a mytho-poetic language that captured the imagination of a large audience. They described themselves as "la voz que se arma para hacerse oír. El rostro que se esconde para mostrarse" (the voice the arms itself to be heard; the face that hides itself to be seen). As Armando Bartra notes, "sólo fue escuchado por todos cuando se hizo acompañar por el tronido de las armas." (Their voice was heard only when it was accompanied by the thunder of weapons).[13] And only by wearing masks were the conditions of their lives made visible. Caminando escuchando (walking-while-listening, i.e. following the will of the people--both in Mexico, and international civil society) they put down their weapons after only 12 days of warfare, declaring "Nuestra arma es nuestra palabra" (our word is our weapon). But the masks remain, paradoxically the only means by which the Zapatistas continue to be visible, and audible.

Before moving on to focus more in detail on how Marcos came to be the primary spokesperson for the Zapatistas, and to review the sources of the specific texts I will submit to a close reading, I wish to make a few preliminary comments about some of the dynamics and challenges of translation that are specific to this subject matter.

CHAPTER TWO

TRANSLATING ZAPATISMO: ZAPATA AS NOURISHMENT OF THE INDIGENOUS

The Zapatistas do not talk in certainties, but in parables and seeming oppositions. The literary quality of their stories and declarations has attracted the support of a great variety of literary elites, including Eduardo Galeano, and the Nobel Prize laureates José Saramago and Gabriel García Márquez. It has been evident to many writers and intellectuals that this phenomenon was indeed "something truly new."[14]

Part of this "really new-ness" has to do with the specific way in which revolution is re-imagined, a theme to which we will return. And part of it has to do with the indigenous or quasi-indigenous forms through which the myth of Zapata as a quasi-messianic revolutionary leader was translated, or re-imagined, through indigenous eyes. In other words, how it was (re-) established in the indigenous imagination.

Although most observers of Zapatismo have focused on the writings and speeches of Marcos, the fair-skinned spokesman for the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), the poetic tone of the movement has been in evidence, from the bottom up, from the first moments of their uprising.

When the EZLN took the "Indian capital" of Chiapas, San Cristóbal de las Casas, on January 1, 1994, a tourist with a videocamera asked a young Zapatista soldier why they had taken the name of General Emiliano Zapata when Zapata was from the state of Morelos. The soldier responded: "Porque Zapata, aunque esté muerto, es el *alimento de los indígenas*…Es *el abono de la gente* de esta tierra, el que nos nutre y nos hace fuertes." (Zapata,

although he is dead, is the food of the indigenous. He is the fertilizer of the people of this land, and he nourishes us and makes us strong.)[15]

This sense of Zapata as fertilizer or food for *los indígenas*, and for all peoples who think of the earth as their mother, is a compass for my study. It points to the peculiar nature of translation in play here. Zapata not only enters the consciousness of *los indígenas* in delayed form, he enters via the very earth they profess to be their spiritual mother. Since *los indígenas* are earth-centered, Zapata entered their lives and consciousness, metaphorically, via a rebirth. It is as if Marcos had (trans)planted Zapata into the Chiapan soil, where he germinated, bore fruit, and was consumed by the Mayans, who were then transfigured, as if Zapata were a religious host that only achieved new life by being ingested in a new (cultural) body and a new earth.

Although I primarily use Marcos' words, to illustrate how and why *los indígenas* de Chiapas came to think of Zapata in this way, it is important to stress that Marcos speaks for a community, and many Mayans speak through him. As Marcos and other Zapatista spokespersons are accustomed to saying, "Por mi voz habla la voz del EZLN."[16] Marcos and the indigenous people of Chiapas have mutually influenced each other. It is the resulting hybrid, collective language that they have created together that I want to explore.

CHAPTER THREE

INTEGRATING "OUR INDIANS" INTO THE NATION: "UNA HÁBIL ALQUIMIA" (A CUNNING ALCHEMY)

"Votán Zapata" is a liberatory symbol that permits a previously marginalized and silenced people to talk, for the first time, directly to the entire Mexican nation—and on to a sizable audience of international sympathizers. But they speak in mediated form—primarily through their mestizo spokesman Marcos. The "Sup" incarnates the "Western"/ indigenous fusion of that is the legacy of the Mexican revolution, but has also become the de facto essence of contemporary indigenous peoples. This mediated indigenismo offers perhaps the only realistic alternative in Mexico to neo-liberalism, or "extreme capitalism." That is a system of unrestricted growth, which is the ideology of a cancer cell, as Edward Abbey once said.[17]

It may be true, as Raymundo Riva Palaco wrote, that "los Zapatistas son un movimiento pequeño burgués que…realmente sirvieron poco más allá de colocar en la agenda nacional al tema indígena." (The Zapatistas are a petite bourgeouis movement that accomplished littled beyond placing the indigenous theme on the national agenda).[18] But what is implied by saying that their only real "bourgeouis" success has been to call national attention to the indigenous agenda? Placing the issue of indigenous peoples at the center of national discourse is no small thing. In spite of the "exaltación ideológica de lo indio" in Mexican politics and art, the marginalization of *los indígenas* in Mexican society, and history, has been profound. The role of contemporary Indians has been more than anything "para consumo externo" (por external consumption), as

anthropologist Bonfil Batalla writes: “el accento exótico que atrae al turista” (the exotic accent that attracts tourists).[19]

Aside from their economic use, *los indígenas*, as symbols, have had a key role in the legitimation of the modern Mexican state. “La imagen india [es] uno de los principales símbolos del nacionalismo oficial,” notes Bonfil Batalla. “El discurso oficial traducido en lenguaje plástico o museográfico, exalta ese mundo muerto como la semilla de origen del México de hoy.” But as for the *indio vivo*, the living Indian, this subject “queda relegado a un segundo plano, cuando no ignorado o negado;” los indios “ocupan…un espacio segregado.” (The Indian image is one of the principal symbols of official nationalism. The offical discourse translated into the language of museums or plastic arts exalts this “dead” world like the seed which gave birth to the Mexico of today…The living Indian remains relegated to a second plane, when not ignored or negated. [They] occupy a segregated space.)[20]

This quasi-indigenous space, which has been institutionalized, honors a glorious past, but it has little to do with actual contemporary *indígenas*. By means of “una hábil alquimia ideológica, aquel pasado pasó a ser el nuestro, el de los mexicanos no indios.” (Through a cunning ideological alchemy, that past becomes ours, that of the non-Indian Mexicans.)[21]

By describing as a “cunning alchemy” the ideological work by which indigenous cultures come to be seen as a national property, and often, the possession or prerogative of non-native peoples, Batalla is of course pointing to a deeply problematic history of exploitative relations between Native Americans and the “developed world.” Alchemy is the transformation of a base matter into gold. Therefore, Batalla’s description echoes a whole history of the West’s sacking of the human and material resources of native peoples. The gold of the Aztecs and the Incas was melted down for the glory of the Spanish crown: this was an essential component of the alchemy of empire. Much of the raw materials of the Americas passed through the isthmus of Panama, on the way to the Old World, on the backs of indigenous and African porters. For centuries, there has been a constant flow, a bleeding of the indigenous heart; through this “hábil alquimia ideológica,” the base

produces the golden superstructure of the colonial, the post-colonial, and now the neo-liberal masters.

The long binary between European and indigenous was expressed in blunt terms in 1883 by Saramiento: "¿Somos Indios o somos Españoles?" (Are we Indians or Spaniards?) The assumption was that only by choosing the latter could Latin Americans hope to modernize and join the "civilized" community of nations. The Mexican revolution began changing this binary in official discourse, by centering the nation's mestizo identity. But even in the best of cases, a presumption has reigned that the nation-states of the Americas, such as México, must absorb and Westernize, or indeed "whiten," their native roots, or their indigenous heart. Lázaro Cárdenas, although he was Mexico's most progressive president of the 20th century, expressed an explicitly assimilationist perspect, which was the hegemonic ideology for most of the 20th century. In 1942, he said: "Hay que mexicanizar a *los indígenas* y no que México se indigenice." (We must Mexicanize the indigenous, rather than trying to indigenize Mexicans).[22] The rebellion of the zapatistas proclaims precisely the opposite: that it is imperative to indigenize Mexico, not only to fulfill the ideas of the original Zapata, but to resist the fatal siren song, or enchantment, of neo-liberalism.

In this context, what the Zapatistas have accomplished, placing "en la agenda nacional al tema indígena," has been a veritable continuation, and indeed an extension, of the Mexican revolution. But this has taken place almost entirely within the realm of texts and representations—a march that may have started on the field of battle, but which soon began a long and largely "victorious" march through representational space.

Chapter Four

Analyzing Zapatista Discourse as Literature: Sources

The place of the Zapatistas in Mexican politics, and their legacy regarding identity politics in Mexico, is a subject that has inspired heated debate, and an enormous body of secondary literature which really cannot be analyzed comprehensively within one book. In any case, it is too early to draw meaningful conclusions about the political legacy of the Zapatistas. My primary focus is more properly literary than political: the analysis of a group of writings, mostly by Marcos, which illustrate how the heritage of Emiliano Zapata was translated into terms comprehensible to the Mayan peoples of Chiapas, in the mountains of southeastern Mexico.

Most of my analysis is centered on writings issued between 1994-2003. But since the Zapatistas continue to explain their perspectives about things such as their environmental worldview, quotes from Zapatistas spokespersons up through 2007 sometimes find their way into my analysis.

It became apparent in 2006, during *La Otra Campaña* (The Other Campaign), that the Zapatistas' moment as central players in Mexican national politics had passed.[23] Meaningful generalizations about their political legacy are still difficult to make. However, much of Zapatista discourse written by Marcos will endure more as literature, than political commentary. Enough time has passed to begin analyzing this body of work as literature. Focusing on stories or essays that explain, in highly metaphorical language, who is Votán Zapata, and what he represents to the Zapatistas, I will analyze these writings in four different, but intersecting registers. The first three of these follow from the broad foci of this thesis, as

previously introduced: indigenismo, revisioning revolution, and translation:

1) the texts as a window on a particular sort of hybrid indigenismo specific to the Zapatistas in general, and Marcos in particular;
2) intertextual references to Mexican literature about the revolution, and more generally, discourse about the legacy of the revolution;
3) intertextual references to other world literatures and political philosophy, especially in reference to Latin American literature and political icons;
4) the mytho-poetic dimensions of Zapatista discourse, using the analytical tools of ethnography and depth psychology.

I draw on five primary sources of Zapatista discourse, the majority Marcos' writings and speeches. These are primarily written texts which were first released on the internet, and later collected in book form, but I also incorporate audio-visual "texts" into my analysis. The most commercially accessible volume is Subcomandante Marcos, *Nuestra Arma es Nuestra Palabra* (also available in English as *Our Word is Our Weapon* from Seven Stories Press, 2001). This book contains selections from many different styles and genres that Marcos employs, including political commentary and correspondence with other literary figures and political leaders. This book also includes selections from the Viejo Antonio and Don Durito stories, which show Marcos working specifically within a fictional or semi-fictional, quasi-indigenous story-telling mode. These groups of stories have been collected and published in book form, which constitute my second primary source: Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, *Relatos de el Viejo Antonio*, and Subcomandante Marcos, *Don Durito de la Lacandona*, with a prologue by Nobel laureate José Saramago.

The Viejo Antonio stories, in addition to being a form of mythopoetics, and political criticism or philosophy in disguised form, also often double as children's tales, and have been published as such. "La Historia de los Colores" has been published both in *Nuestra Arma es Nuestra Palabra* and in *Relatos de el Viejo*