



## Our Word Is Our Weapon

writing by subcomandante insurgente marcos

\* Twelve Women in the Twelfth Hour

\* WAR! First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle

\* Letter To Mumia Abu-Jamal



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## Twelve Women in the Twelfth Year

### The Moment of War

MARCH 11, 1996

*During the twelfth year of the Zapatistas, many kilometers and at a great distance from Beijing, twelve women meet March 8 with their faces erased...*

#### I. Yesterday . . .

ALTHOUGH HER FACE is wreathed in black, still one can see a few strands of hair upon her forehead, and the eyes with the spark of one who searches. Before her she holds an M-1 carbine in the "assault" position. She has a pistol strapped to her waist. Over the left side of the chest, that place where hopes and convictions reside, she carries the rank of infantry major of an insurgent army that has called itself, this cold dawn of January 1, 1994, the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

Under her command, a rebel column takes the former capital of the southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas, San Cristobal de Las Casas. The central square of San Cristobal is deserted. Only the indigenous men and women under her command are witnesses to the moment in which the major, a rebel indigenous Tzotzil woman, takes the national flag and gives it to the commanders of the rebellion, those called "The Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee." At 02:00 southeastern time, January 1 of 1994, over the radio, the major says, "We have recovered the flag. 10-23 over."

For the rest of the world, it is 01:00 hours of the New Year, but for her, those words mark a decade-long wait. In December 1984, not yet twenty years old, she arrives in the mountains of the Lacandon jungle, carrying the marks of the whole history of indigenous humiliation on her body. In December 1984 this brown woman says, "Enough is enough!" so softly that only she hears herself. In January 1994 this woman and several thousand indigenous people do not just say, but yell, "Enough is enough!" so loudly that all the world hears them...

Outside San Cristobal another column of indigenous rebels, who attack the city under the command of the only man with light skin and a large nose, has just taken the police headquarters. It frees from these clandestine jails the indigenous



who were spending the New Year locked up, guilty of the most terrible crime in the Chiapanecan southeast: being poor.

The indigenous rebel Tzeltal—Capitán Insurgente Eugenio Asparuk—together with the enormous nose, is now overseeing the search and seizure of the headquarters. When the major's message arrives, Capitán Insurgente Pedro—an indigenous rebel Chol—has finished taking the Federal Highway Police Headquarters, and has secured the road that connects San Cristobal with Tuxtla Gutierrez. Capitán Insurgente Ubilio—also an indigenous rebel Tzeltal—has taken the entryways to the north of the city and with it the National Indigenous Institute, symbol of the government handouts to the indigenous people. Capitán Insurgente Guillermo—an indigenous rebel Chol—has seized the highest point of the city. From there he can observe a surprised silence peering out the windows of the houses and buildings. Insurgent and equally rebellious Capitáns Gilberto and Noe, indigenous Tzotzil and Tzeltal respectively, end their takeover of the State Judicial Police Headquarters and set it on fire before marching on to secure the other side of the city and the roads that lead to the barracks of the thirty-first Military Zone in Rancho Nuevo.

At 02:00 hours, southeastern time, January 1, 1994, five insurgent officials, indigenous rebel men, hear over the radio the voice of their commander, an indigenous rebel woman: "We have recovered the flag. 10-23 over." They repeat this to their troops, men and women, all indigenous and unconditionally rebellious, and translate the words: "We have begun..."

At the Municipal Palace, the major secures the positions that will protect the men and women who now govern the city, a city now under the rule of indigenous rebels. An armed woman protects them.

Among the indigenous commanders there is a tiny woman, even tinier than those around her. Her face is wreathed in black; still, one can see a few strands of hair upon her forehead, and the gaze with the spark of one who searches. A twelve-gauge sawed-off shotgun hangs from her back. Wearing the traditional dress of the women from San Andres, Ramona, together with hundreds of women, walks down from the mountains toward the city of San Cristobal on that last night of 1993. Together with Susana and other indigenous people, she is part of that indigenous war command which, in 1994, gives birth to the CCRI-CG, the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee of the General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, the EZLN.

Comandante Ramona's size and brilliance will surprise the international press when she appears in the Cathedral—where the first Dialogues for Peace are held—and pulls from her backpack the national flag, seized by the major on January. Ramona does not know it then, nor do we, that she carries an illness that takes huge bites of her body, eats away at her life and dims her voice and her gaze.

Ramona and the major, the only women in the Zapatista delegation who show themselves to the world for the first time, declare, "For all intents and purposes, we were already dead. We meant absolutely nothing." With these words they can almost convey the humiliation and abandonment. The major translates to Ramona the questions of the reporters. Ramona nods and understands, as though the answers she is asked for had always been there, in her tiny figure that laughs at the Spanish language and at the ways of the city women. Ramona laughs when she does not know she is dying. And when she knows, she still laughs. Before she did not exist for anyone; now she exists, as a woman, as an indigenous woman, as a rebel woman. Now Ramona lives, a woman belonging to that race that must die in order to live...

The major watches as the light takes possession the streets of San Cristobal. Her soldiers secure the defense of the old city of Jovel and the protection of the men and women who are now sleeping, indigenous and mestizos, all equally surprised. The major, this indigenous rebel woman, has taken their city. Hundreds of armed indigenous people surround the old city. An armed woman commands them...

Minutes later the rebels will take the city of Las Margaritas; hours later the government forces that defend Ocosingo, Altamirano, and Chanal will surrender. Huixtan and Oxchuc are taken by a rebel column that heads toward the principal jail of San Cristobal. Now seven cities are in insurgent hands, following the seven words said by the major.

The war for the word has begun.

Elsewhere, other indigenous and rebellious women remake that piece of history that had been given them and that, until that January 1, had been carried in silence. They too have no name or face.

**Irma.** Capitán Insurgente Irma, a Chol woman, leads one of the guerrilla columns that takes the plaza at Ocosingo that January 1, 1994. From one of the edges of the central square, together with the soldiers under her command, she attacks the garrison inside the Municipal Palace until they surrender. Then Irma undoes her braid and her hair falls to her waist as though to say, "Here I am, free and new." Capitán Irma's hair shines, and continues to shine, even as the night falls over Ocosingo in rebel hands.

**Laura.** Capitán Insurgente Laura is a Tzotzil woman. Fierce in battle and fiercely committed to learning and teaching, Laura becomes the captain of a unit composed only of men, all novices. With the same patience as the mountain that has watched her grow, Laura teaches and gives orders. When the men under her command have doubts, she sets an example. No one carries as much or walks as far as she does. After the attack on Ocosingo, she orders the retreat of her unit. It is orderly and



complete. This woman with light skin says little or nothing, but she carries in her hands a carbine that she has taken from a policeman, he who only saw someone to humiliate or rape as he gazed upon her, an indigenous woman. After surrendering, the policeman ran away in his shorts, the same one who until that day believed that women were only useful when pregnant or in the kitchen...

**Elisa.** Capitán Insurgente Elisa still carries mortar fragments that are planted forever in her body as a war trophy. She takes command of her column when the rebel line is broken and a circle of fire fills the Ocosingo market with blood. Capitán Benito has been injured and has lost his eye. Before losing consciousness, he explains: "I've had it, Capitán Elisa is in command." Capitán Elisa is already wounded when she manages to take a handful of soldiers out of the market. When Capitán Elisa, indigenous Tzeltal, gives orders, it is a soft murmur... but everyone obeys.

**Silvia.** Capitán Insurgente Silvia was trapped for ten days in the rathole that Ocosingo became after January 2. Dressed as a civilian, she scuttled along the streets of a city filled with federal soldiers, tanks, and cannons. Stopped at a military checkpoint, she is let through almost immediately. "It isn't possible that such a young and fragile woman could be a rebel," say the soldiers as they watch her pass. When she rejoins her unit in the mountains, the indigenous Chol rebel woman appears sad. Carefully, I ask her the reason why her laughter is dampened. "Over there in Ocosingo," she answers me, lowering her eyes, "I left my backpack, and with it all the music cassettes I had collected. Now we have nothing." Silence and her loss lie in her hands. I say nothing. I add my own regrets to hers, and I see that in war each loses what he or she most loves.

**Maribel.** Capitán Insurgente Maribel takes the radio station in Las Margaritas when her unit assaults the municipality on January 1, 1994. For nine years she has lived in the mountains so she could sit in front of that microphone and say, "We are the product of five hundred years of struggle; first we fought against slavery..."<sup>1</sup> The transmission fails due to technical difficulties. Maribel takes another position and covers the back of the unit that advances toward Comitán. Days later she will serve as guard for a prisoner of war, General Absalón Castellanos Domínguez.<sup>2</sup> Maribel is Tzeltal and was not yet fifteen years old when she came to the mountains of the Mexican Southeast. "The toughest moment in those nine years was when I had to climb the first hill, called 'the hill from hell.' After that, everything else was easy," said the insurgent official. When General Castellanos Domínguez is released, Capitán Maribel is the first rebel to have contact with the government. Extending his hand to her, Commissioner Manuel Camacho Solís

asks her age. "Five hundred and two," replies Maribel, who is as old as the rebellion...

**Isidora.** Capitán Insurgente Isidora, on that first day of January, a buck private, goes into Ocosingo. After spending hours rescuing her unit made up entirely of men, forty of whom were wounded, she leaves Ocosingo in flames, mortar fragments in her arms and legs. When Isidora arrives at the nursing unit and hands over the wounded, she asks for a bit of water and gets up again. "Where are you going?" they ask her as they try to treat the bleeding wounds that paint her face and redden her uniform. "To get the others," answers Isidora as she reloads her gun. They try to stop her and cannot. Buck Private Isidora says she must return to Ocosingo to rescue their *compañeros* from the dirge of mortars and grenades. They have to take her prisoner to stop her. "The only good thing about this punishment is that, at least, I can't be demoted," says Isidora, and she waits in a room that to her appears to be a jail. Months later, given a star and a promotion to infantry official, Isidora, Tzeltal and Zapatista, looks first at the star and then at her commander and asks, "Why?" As though she were being scolded, she does not wait for an answer...

**Amalia.** First lieutenant in the hospital unit. Amalia has the quickest laugh in the Mexican Southeast. When she finds Capitán Benito unconscious, lying in a pool of blood, she drags him to safety. She carries him on her back and takes him past the circle of death that surrounds the market. When someone mentions surrender, Amalia, honoring the Chol blood that runs through her veins, gets angry and begins to argue. Notwithstanding the ruthless explosions and the flying bullets, everyone listens. No one surrenders.

**Elena.** Lieutenant in the hospital unit. When Lieutenant Elena joined the Zapatistas, she was illiterate. There she learned to read, to write, and to administer medicine. Dealing with diarrhea and giving vaccines, she goes on to care for the wounded in a small hospital, which is also a home, a warehouse, and a pharmacy. With difficulty, she extracts from the Zapatistas' bodies mortar fragments. "Some I can take out, some I can't," says Elenita, an insurgent Chol, as though she were speaking of memories and not of pieces of lead.

In San Cristobal, that morning of January 1, 1994, she communicates with the great white nose: "Someone just came here asking questions, but I don't understand the language, I think it's English. I don't know if he's a photographer, but he has a camera."

"I'll be there soon," answers the nose as he rearranges the ski mask. Putting the weapons that have been taken from the police station into a vehicle, he travels to the center of the city. They take the weapons out and distribute them

among the indigenous who are guarding the Municipal Palace. The foreigner is a tourist who asks if he may leave the city. "No," answers the ski mask with the oversize nose. "It's better that you return to your hotel. We don't know what will happen." The tourist leaves after asking permission to film with his video camera. Meanwhile the morning advances, and with the curious arrive the journalists and questions. The nose responds and explains to the locals, tourists, and journalists. The major is behind him. The ski mask talks and makes jokes. A woman who is armed watches his back.

A journalist, from behind a television camera, asks, "And who are you?"

"Who am I?" repeats the ski mask hesitantly, fighting off sleep after a long night.

"Yes," insists the journalist. "Are you 'Commander Tiger' or 'Commander Lion'?"

"No," responds the ski mask, rubbing his eyes, which are now filled with boredom.

"So, what's your name?" asks the journalist as he thrusts his camera and microphone forward. The big-nosed ski mask answers, "Marcos. Subcomandante Marcos."

Overhead, Pilatus planes begin to circle.

From that moment on, the impeccable military action of the taking of San Cristobal is blurred, and with it the fact that it was a woman—a rebel indigenous woman—who commanded the entire operation is erased. The participation of other rebel women in the actions of January 1, and during the ten-year-long road since the birth of the Zapatistas, become secondary. The faces covered with ski masks become even more anonymous when the lights focus on Marcos. The major says nothing, and she continues to watch the back of that enormous nose, which now has a name for the rest of the world. No one asks her name.

At dawn on January 2, 1994, that same woman directs the retreat from San Cristobal and the return to the mountains. Fifty days later, she comes back to San Cristobal as part of the escort that safeguards the delegates of the CCRI-CG of the Zapatista National Liberation Army to the Dialogues for Peace at the Cathedral. Some women journalists interview her and ask her name. "Ana Maria, Mayor Insurgente Ana María," she answers with her dark gaze. She leaves the cathedral and disappears for the rest of the year, 1994. Like her other *compañeras*, she must wait, she must be silent...

In December 1994, ten years after becoming a soldier, Ana María receives the order to prepare to break out of the military blockade established by government forces around the Lacandon jungle. At dawn on December 19, the Zapatistas take positions in thirty-eight municipalities. Ana María leads the action in the municipalities of the Altos of Chiapas. Twelve women officers are with her: Monica, Isabela, Yuri, Patricia, Juana, Ofelia, Celina, María, Gabriela, Alicia, Zenaida, and María Luisa. Ana María herself takes the municipality of Bochil.



After the Zapatista deployment, the high command of the federal army surrounds their ruptured blockade with silence, and, represented by the mass media, declares it is pure propaganda on the part of the EZLN. The *federales'* pride is deeply wounded: the Zapatistas have broken the blockade and, adding insult to injury, various municipalities have been taken by a unit headed by a woman. Much money is spent to keep this unacceptable event from the people. Due to the involuntary actions of her armed *compañeros*, and the deliberate actions of the government, Ana María and the Zapatista women at her side are ignored and kept invisible.

## • II. Today . . .

I HAVE ALMOST finished writing this when someone arrives...

**Doña Juanita.** After Old Don Antonio<sup>3</sup> dies, Doña Juanita allows her life to slow down to the gentle pace she uses when preparing coffee. Physically strong, Doña Juanita has announced she will die. "Don't be silly, grandmother," I say, refusing to meet her eyes. "Look, you," she answers. "If we must die in order to live, nothing will keep me from dying, much less a young brat like yourself," scolds Doña Juanita, Old Don Antonio's woman, a rebel woman all her life, and apparently, a rebel even in response to her death.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the blockade, she appears.

**She.** Has no military rank, no uniform, no weapon. Only she knows she is a Zapatista. Much like the Zapatistas, she has no face or name. She struggles for democracy, liberty, and justice, just like the Zapatistas. She is part of what the EZLN calls "civil society"—a people without a political party, who do not belong to "political society," made up of leaders of political parties. Rather, she is a part of that amorphous yet solid part of society that says, day after day, "Enough is enough!"

At first she is surprised at her own words. But over time, through the strength of repeating them, and above all living them, she stops being afraid of these words, stops being afraid of herself. She is now a Zapatista; she has joined her destiny with the new delirium of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, which so terrorizes political parties and Power's intellectuals. She has already fought against everyone—against her husband, her lover, her boyfriend, her children, her friend, her brother, her father, her grandfather. "You are insane," they say. She leaves a great deal behind. What she renounces, if one is talking about size, is much greater than what the empty-handed rebels leave behind. Her every-

thing, her world, demands she forget "those crazy Zapatistas," while conformity calls her to sit down in the comfortable indifference that lives and worries only about itself. She leaves everything behind. She says nothing. Early one dawn she sharpens the tender point of hope and begins to emulate many times in one day, at least 364 times a year, the January 1 of her sister Zapatistas.

She smiles. Once she merely admired the Zapatistas, but no longer. Her admiration ended the moment she understood that they are a mirror of her rebellion, of her hope.

She discovers that she is born on January 1, 1994. From then on she feels that her life—and what was always said to be a dream and a utopia—might actually be a truth.

In silence and without pay, side by side with other men and women, she begins to knit that complex dream that some call hope: "Everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves."

She meets March 8 with her face erased, and her name hidden. With her come thousands of women. More and more arrive. Dozens, hundreds, thousands, millions of women who remember all over the world that there is much to be done and remember that there is still much to fight for. It appears that dignity is contagious, and it is the women who are more likely to become infected with this uncomfortable ill...

This March 8 is a good time to remember and to give their rightful place to the insurgent Zapatistas, to the women who are armed and unarmed.

To remember the rebels and those uncomfortable Mexican women now bent over knitting that history which, without them, is nothing more than a badly made fable.

### III. Tomorrow . . .

IF THERE IS to be one, it will be made with the women, and above all, by them...

*From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast*

SUBCOMANDANTE INSURGENTE MARCOS

### NOTES

1. Opening lines of the Zapatista Declaration of War.
2. General Absalón Castellanos Domínguez, governor of Chiapas from 1982 to 1988, was believed to be responsible for many deaths in the state. He was kidnapped by the Zapatistas in an effort to send a message out to the Mexican government and the people.
3. Old Don Antonio was a Mayan shaman who befriended Marcos. Their decade-long relationship is the inspiration for the Old Don Antonio tales, in which Marcos passes on many of the creation myths that are written in the *Popol Vuh*, a sacred Mayan text.



## War!

### First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle

JANUARY 2, 1994

*To the people of Mexico*

*Mexican brothers and sisters:*

WE ARE A PRODUCT of five hundred years of struggle: first, led by insurgents against slavery during the War of Independence with Spain; then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism; then to proclaim our constitution and expel the French empire from our soil; later when the people rebelled against Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship, which denied us the just application of the reform laws, and leaders like Villa and Zapata<sup>1</sup> emerged, poor men just like us who have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food or education, not the right to freely and democratically elect our political representatives, nor independence from foreigners. There is no peace or justice for ourselves and our children.

But today we say: ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation. We are millions, the dispossessed who call upon our brothers and sisters to join this struggle as the only path, so that we will not die of hunger due to the insatiable ambition of a seventy-year dictatorship led by a clique of traitors who represent the most conservative and sellout groups. They are the same ones that opposed Hidalgo and Morelos,<sup>2</sup> the same ones that betrayed Vicente Guerrero,<sup>3</sup> the same ones that sold half our country to the foreign invader, the same ones that imported a European prince to rule our country, the same ones that formed the "scientific" Porfirista dictatorship,<sup>4</sup> the same ones that opposed the Petroleum Expropriation,<sup>5</sup> the same ones that massacred the railroad workers in 1958 and the students in 1968, the same ones that today take everything from us, absolutely everything.

To prevent the continuation of the above and as our last hope, after having tried to utilize all legal means based on our Magna Carta, we go to our constitution, to apply Article 39, which says:

National Sovereignty essentially and originally resides in the people. All political power emanates from the people and its purpose is to help the people. The people have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government.

Therefore, according to our Constitution, we declare the following to the Mexican federal army, the pillar of the Mexican dictatorship from which we suffer, monopolized by a one-party system and led by Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the maximum and illegitimate federal executive that today holds power.

According to this Declaration of War, we ask that other powers of the nation advocate to restore the legitimacy and the stability of the nation by overthrowing the dictator.

We also ask that international organizations and the International Red Cross watch over and regulate our battles, so that our efforts are carried out while still protecting our civilian population. We declare, now and always, that we are subject to the Geneva Accord, forming the EZLN as the fighting arm of our struggle for liberation. We have the Mexican people on our side, we have the nation and the beloved tricolored flag, highly respected by our insurgent fighters; our uniforms are black and red, symbol of our working people on strike; and we will always carry our flag, emblazoned with the letters "EZLN," the Zapatista National Liberation Army, into combat.

From the outset, we reject all intentions to disgrace our just cause, accusing us of being drug traffickers, drug guerrillas, thieves, or other names that might be used by our enemies. Our struggle adheres to the Constitution and is inspired by its call for justice and equality.

Therefore, according to this Declaration of War, we give our military forces, the EZLN, the following orders:

**First:** Advance to the capital of the country, overcoming the Mexican federal army, protecting in our advance the civilian population, and permitting the people liberated to elect, freely and democratically, their own administrative authorities.

**Second:** Respect the lives of our prisoners and turn over all wounded to the International Red Cross.

**Third:** Initiate summary judgments against all soldiers of the Mexican federal army and the political police who have received training or have been paid by foreigners—they are accused of being traitors to our country—and against all those who have repressed and mistreated the civil population, or robbed from or attempted crimes against the good of the people.

**Fourth:** Form new troops with all those Mexicans who show interest in joining our struggle, including those who, being enemy soldiers, turn themselves in



without having fought against us, and promise to take orders from the General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

**Fifth:** We ask for the unconditional surrender of the enemy's headquarters, before we begin to combat, in order to avoid any loss of lives.

**Sixth:** Suspend the robbery of our natural resources in the areas controlled by the EZLN.

*To the people of Mexico:*

We—men and women, whole and free—are conscious that the war that we have declared is a last—but just—resort. For many years, the dictators have been waging an undeclared genocidal war against our people. Therefore, we ask for your decided participation to support this plan by the Mexican people who struggle for work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace. We declare that we will not stop fighting until the basic demands of our people have been met, by forming a government for our country that is free and democratic.

## JOIN THE INSURGENT FORCES OF THE ZAPATISTA NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY.

GENERAL COMMAND OF THE EZLN

1993

### NOTES

1. Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata were two rebel leaders during the Mexican Revolution in 1911. Pancho Villa was a volatile, controversial man capable of great deeds and of much cruelty. With his men, he helped secure the northern part of Mexico for the revolution against President Porfirio Diaz. Emiliano Zapata, a charismatic peasant leader, brought the revolution up from the south of the country and marched into Mexico City to take over the presidency of Francisco Madero. Zapata was instrumental in the creation of the Constitution of 1917, in which indigenous lands are declared autonomous, and which set up the parameters for agrarian reform in Mexico.
2. Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1753–1811), a priest in the Roman Catholic Church who produced illegitimate children in defiance of his clerical vows, is considered the father of his country. He never took his priestly vows too seriously, reading the anticlerical works of the French encyclopedic philosophers and apparently regarding the Church as a sort of sinecure that would provide him with a regular income. Hidalgo's impulse toward freedom for his people was also fed by a strong egalitarian instinct, which resulted in Hidalgo's famed grito ("shout") from his pulpit at 11 p.m. of September 15, 1810. Though the grito is hailed today as a declaration of independence from Spain, in reality it was a declaration of defiance against Joseph Bonaparte and the Spaniards resident in Mexico as well as allegiance to the very undeserving Ferdinand VII. With Ignacio Allende, an intellectual comrade, Hidalgo gathered a force of 80,000 to march against royalist forces. They were ultimately defeated, but when they heard of a new rebellion in San Antonio de Bejar (today San Antonio, Texas), they moved north to join it. On March 21, in

the mountains of Coahuila, they were ambushed by a traitor and turned over to the Spanish authorities. Because he was a priest, albeit an excommunicated one, Hidalgo was turned over to the bishop of Durango for an official defrocking. On July 30, 1811, he was shot in Chihuahua.

Father Francisco Morelos offered his services as a priest to Hidalgo's army. Hidalgo refused, instead instructing Morelos to go back to the south and lead the rebellion on the Pacific Coast. At one point, in 1813, his forces controlled Acapulco and most of Southwest Mexico. They even surrounded and cut off Mexico City from reinforcements and supplies. However, Morelos realized that he could not defeat the royalist army of New Spain in direct combat. He altered his strategy, and turned his attention to instructing his followers in the art of guerrilla warfare. His followers became masters of small group engagements. In 1813 Morelos helped to create a Revolutionary Congress, whose purpose was to draft a constitution and to design laws for the new country; he was a signatory of the new constitution. As the conflict wore on in New Spain, the government's armies became vicious, and Morelos instructed his followers to do the same to all whites and mixed bloods. Thus what began as a noble cause, concerned with the civil rights of all people, degenerated into a vicious killing circle. Morelos was finally captured on November 5, 1815, at Tescmalaca. He was sentenced to death, and executed on December 22, 1815, at San Cristobal Ecatepec, a village just to the north of Guadalupe.

3. Vicente Guerrero (1782–1831), Mexican revolutionary leader, won guerrilla victories over Spanish forces. Guerrero served briefly (1829) as president, but he was forced to retreat and was finally captured and shot.
4. "Porfirista dictatorship" refers to Porfirio Díaz, absolute ruler of Mexico for thirty-five years, serving as president from 1876 to 1880 and from 1884 to 1911. (In the four-year interim, the post of president was held by a Díaz puppet named Manuel González.) An indigenous Oaxacan, Díaz was born in 1830 to José de la Cruz Díaz and Petrona Mori. He came to power as a champion of liberal principles—more municipal democracy, limited terms, and so on—but once he assumed the presidency, it soon became clear that his main concerns were internal stability and foreign investment. Anxious to create a climate of confidence for investors, Díaz addressed the problem of internal security with a simple solution: co-opting the most notorious bandits and putting them into the dreaded Rurales ("Rural Police"), a paramilitary force that was far better trained and paid than the unwilling conscripts dragooned into the army. The bandit problem disappeared overnight, and as time went by, the Rurales would also serve as an effective force against peasant revolts. Having brutally achieved domestic tranquility, Díaz opened the country up to foreign capital, both U.S. and European.
5. In 1938 Lázaro Cárdenas, the most left-wing president in Mexican history, became a national hero by expropriating the big foreign oil companies—such as William Doheny's Mexican Petroleum Company and the Waters Pierce Company, with links to Standard Oil—that had dominated in the petroleum-producing regions of the Gulf Coast of Mexico. Even though such political enemies as the church and business conservatives applauded this nationalistic gesture, Mexico faced a grim two-year period when the United States, Great Britain, and Holland agreed on a boycott of Mexican oil. Mexico's oil industry was saved only by World War II; disturbed because Cárdenas was selling petroleum to Hitler—which he had to do to keep Mexico from drowning in its own oil—the boycotting powers lifted the ban.



## Letter to Mumia Abu-Jamal

APRIL 24, 1999

*To Mumia Abu-Jamal, American Union*

Mr. Mumia:

I AM WRITING TO YOU in the name of the men, women, children, and elderly of the Zapatista National Liberation Army in order to congratulate you on April 24, your birthday.

Perhaps you have heard of us. We are Mexican, mostly indigenous, and we took up arms on January 1, 1994, demanding a voice, a face, and a name for the forgotten of the earth.

Since then, the Mexican government has made war on us, pursues and harasses us seeking our death, our disappearance, and our absolute silence. The reason? These lands are rich with oil, uranium, and precious lumber. The government wants them for the great transnational companies. We want them for all Mexicans. The government sees our lands as a business. We see our history written in these lands. In order to defend our right (and that of all Mexicans) to live with liberty, democracy, justice, and dignity we became an army and took on a name, a voice, and a face.

Perhaps you wonder how we know of you, about your birthday, and why it is that we extend this long bridge that goes from the mountains of the Mexican Southeast to the prison of Pennsylvania, where you are unjustly incarcerated. Many good people from many parts of the world have spoken of you; through them we have learned how you were ambushed by the American police in December 1981, of the lies that they constructed in the procedures against you, and of your death sentence in 1982. We learned about your birthday through the international mobilizations that, under the name of "Millions for Mumia," are being prepared this April 24.

It is harder to explain this bridge that this letter extends, it is more complicated. I could tell you that, for the powerful of Mexico and the government, to be indigenous, or to look indigenous, is reason for disdain, abhorrence, distrust, and hatred. The racism that now floods the palaces of Power in Mexico goes to the extreme of carrying out a war of extermination and genocide against millions of indigenous. I am sure that you will find similarities with what Power in the

United States does with the so-called people of color (African Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Asians, North American Indians, and any other people who do not have the insipid color of money).

We are also "people of color" (the same color as our brothers who have Mexican blood and live and struggle in the American Union). Our color is "brown," the color of the earth, the color from which we take our history, our strength, our wisdom, and our hope. But in order to struggle we add the color black to our brown. We use black ski masks to show our faces. Only then can we be seen and heard. Following the advice of a Mayan elder, who explained to us the meaning of the color black, we chose this color.

Old Don Antonio, this wise elder, died in these rebel Zapatista lands in March 1994, a victim of tuberculosis, which gnawed away at his lungs and his breath. Old Don Antonio used to tell us that from black came light, and from there came the stars that light up the sky around the world. He recounted a story of a long time ago (when time was not yet measured), when the first gods were entrusted to give birth to the world. In one of their gatherings, they understood that the world needed to have life and movement, but in order to have life and movement, light was necessary. Then they thought of making the sun so that the days would move, making day and night, and time for struggling, and time for making love, and the world would go walking with the days and nights. The gods had their gathering and came to this agreement in front of a large fire, and they knew it was necessary that one of them be sacrificed by throwing himself into the fire, and himself become fire and fly into the sky. The gods thought that the sun's work was the most important, so they chose the most beautiful god to step into the fire and become the sun. But he was afraid. The smallest god, the one who was black, said he was not afraid, and he threw himself into the fire and became the sun. Then the world had light and movement, and there was time for struggle and time for love, and while it was day the bodies worked to make the world, and while it was night the bodies made love and sparkles filled the darkness.

This is what Old Don Antonio told us, and that is why we use black ski masks. So we are of the color brown and of the color black. But we are also yellow, because the first people who walked these lands were made of corn so they would be true. And we are also red, because this is the call of blood that has dignity. And we are also blue, because we are the sky in which we fly. And green, for the mountain that is our house and our strength. And we are white, because we are paper so that tomorrow can write its story.

So we are seven colors, because there were seven first gods who birthed the world. This is what Old Don Antonio said long ago, and now I tell you this story so that you may understand the reason for this bridge of paper and ink that I send to you, all the way from the mountains of the Mexican Southeast.



And also so that you may understand that with this bridge go greetings and embraces for Leonard Peltier (who is in Leavenworth prison), and for the more than 100 political prisoners in the United States, who are the victims of injustice, stupidity, and authoritarianism.

Also, on this letter-bridge walks a greeting for the Dine (the Navajo), who fight in Big Mountain, Arizona, against the violations of their traditional Dine religious practices. They struggle against those who favor large businesses and don't respect the religious freedom of the indigenous people, against those who want to destroy sacred grounds and ceremonial sites (as is the case with the Peabody Western Coal Company, which, without reason, wants to take the lands, the land rights, and with them the history that belong to the Dine and their future generations).

But this letter-bridge has more than just stories of resistance against American injustice. In the extreme south of our continent, in Chile, the indigenous Mapuche women in the Pewenche Center of Alto Bio-Bio confront stupidity. Bertha and Nicolasa Quintreman are accused of "mistreating" members of the Chilean government armed forces. There you have it. An armed military unit with rifles, sticks, and tear gas, protected by bullet-proof vests, helmets, and shields, accuses two indigenous women of "mistreatment." But Bertha is seventy-four years old, and Nicolasa is sixty. How is it possible that two elderly people confronted a "heroic" group of heavily armed military? Because they are Mapuche. The story is the same as that of the Dine brothers and sisters of Arizona—it repeats itself throughout the Americas. A company—ENDESA<sup>1</sup>—wants the Mapuches' land, and in spite of the law that protects the indigenous, the government is on the side of the companies. The Mapuche students have pointed out that the government, the company, and the military intelligence have conducted a "study" of the Mapuche communities. Its conclusion? That the Mapuche cannot think, cannot defend themselves, cannot resist. That the Mapuche are incapable of building a better future for themselves. Apparently, the study was wrong.

It now occurs to me... perhaps the powerful ones in the United States did a similar "military intelligence" study—frankly, this is a contradiction, because those of us who are military are not intelligent; otherwise, we wouldn't be military—on the Dine in Arizona, on Leonard Peltier, on other political prisoners, on you, Mr. Mumia.

Perhaps they made this study and came to the conclusion that they might be able to violate justice and reason, to assault history and lose the truth, and that no one would say anything. The Dine Indians would stand by and watch the destruction of the most sacred of their history, Leonard Peltier would be alone, and you, Mr. Mumia, would be silenced. (I remember your own words: "They not only want my death, they want my silence.")

But the studies were wrong. Happy mistake? The Dine resist against those who would kill their memory, Leonard Peltier is accompanied by all those who demand his liberty, and you sir, today you speak and shout with all the voices which celebrate your birthday as all birthdays should be celebrated, by struggling.

*Mr. Mumia:*

WE HAVE NOTHING BIG to give you as a gift for your birthday. It is poor and little, but all of us send you an embrace.

We hope that when you gain your freedom, you will come to visit us. Then we will give you a birthday party, and if it isn't April 24, it will be an unbirthday party. There will be music, dance, and talk, the means by which men and women of all colors understand and know one another, and build bridges over which they walk together, toward history, toward tomorrow.

Happy Birthday!

*Vale.* We greet you, and may justice and truth find their place.

*From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast*

SUBCOMANDANTE INSURGENTE MARCOS

P.S.

I READ SOMEWHERE that you are a father and a grandfather. So I am sending you a gift for your children and grandchildren. It is a little wooden car with Zapatistas dressed in black ski masks.

Tell your children and grandchildren that it is a gift the Zapatistas have sent you. You can explain to them that there are people of all colors everywhere, just like you, who want justice, liberty, and democracy for everyone.

#### NOTE

1. ENDESA: Empresa Nacional de Electricidad Sociedad Anónima, a leading electric utility in South America.








# Dying In Order to Live

JANUARY 6, 1994

*Here we are, the dead of all times, dying once again, but now in order to live.*

DURING THESE PAST TEN years more than 150,000 indigenous have died of curable diseases. The federal, state, and municipal governments and their economic and social programs do not take into account any real solution to our problems; they limit themselves to giving us charity every time elections roll around. Charity resolves nothing but for the moment, and again death visits our homes. That is why we think no, no more; enough dying this useless death; it is better to fight for change. If we die now, it will not be with shame but with dignity, like our ancestors. We are ready to die, 150,000 more if necessary; so that our people awaken from this dream of deceit that holds us hostage.

SUBCOMANDANTE INSURGENTE MARCOS



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