

## **Chiapas: The New Face of the War**

**By Andrés Aubry**

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The new pollution that disturbs what is called the conflict zone is due to old actors that changed tactics, gave themselves a new face and other names: URCI and Opddic. Before identifying them and analyzing the worrisome, profound and dangerous transformation of the Lacandón Jungle's new panorama, it's important to traverse the process from its beginnings to the recent situation revealed by the spate of comunicués that emanated not from the General Command but from the Good Government Juntas of all their Caracoles. The current objective of the counterinsurgency presents itself as a disturbance of the territorial geography, to return to their old owners "the recuperated lands" or those progressively liberated by the EZLN since the times of their clandestinity.

### **Dispute over the "recuperated lands"**

Before the conflict broke out, the owners of the Jungle were successively the lumber camps for looting the forest's wealth, the *chicleros*, the unconstitutional large estates progressively converted into cattle ranches, the drug traffickers and 400 Lacandón finally "concentrated" by Echeverría in what now is the national Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve. Between these empires existed wilderness spaces, the national lands, which were offered to migrations of landless campesinos with the promulgation of "the opening of the agricultural frontier" by José López Portillo. The EZLN was born in this space in 1983.

In the second half of the six-year term of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the Zapatistas were already a powerful movement, although clandestine, and towards it converged thousands of migrants who aspired to make the jungle theirs, cradle of civilization, forming there new ejidos with cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, never finalized. The EZLN presented itself as a defensive army, to protect them from the old owners; that is to say, just as president Lázaro Cárdenas had given weapons to the campesinos to defend their first ejidos and rural schools a long time ago, so the EZLN progressively cleaned the jungle of those who had usurped it.

The first to go were the *narcos* (drug dealers), therefore the police (always present now) did away with their weapons, offering them without problem to the Zapatistas, because they confused them with the cattle ranchers' *pistoleros* (hired guns), but didn't sell them (illegally of course) without prior training of their clients. Thus began a bad time for the cattle ranchers but also a good one for the campesinos: they were recuperating land with ejidos in formation until Salinas, in 1992, reforming Article 27 of the Constitution, declared that no longer would land be distributable. Under pressure from January 1, 1994, the large cattle ranchers also abandoned the Jungle.

Since then, the EZLN initiated its public phase. To create the conditions of the first peace dialogue, that in the Cathedral, the commissioner Camacho's diplomacy achieved creating a "gray zone," without soldiers (grosso modo, that of the former national lands), in exchange for which the EZLN released former governor Absalón Castellanos Domínguez. Subsequently, the tragic day of February 9, 1995 happened, which endangered the truce pact of January 12 of the previous year. On March 11, the Law of Dialogue was promulgated, which made possible another dialogue, that of San Andrés. Camacho's gray zone, but without it in that new circumstance, was converted into the space in which the EZLN, in

accordance with the new law, were transforming themselves from an armed movement into a “political force,” with the progressive and peaceful creation of the Zapatista autonomous municipalities (counties). Starting in 2003, the creation of the Caracoles gave birth to an enormous peaceful and political effort, fed by alternative schools and clinics, agroecology programs and a direct (without intermediaries) promissory alternate economy of organic products.

This ejido space (with presidential resolution favorable but not executed) is that which the EZLN calls “recuperated lands,” not only in its agrarian aspect but also in terms of social management. Today, with URCI, the Opddic and even finqueros whose old ownerships were paid a good price by the government, it is once again threatened and, in spite of the cancellation of the agrarian distribution by Salinas in 1992, is now on the path to legalization through the Agrarian legal office for the benefit of these new usurpers. What is in play, therefore, is a return of the old prewar owners to the status quo ante. The victims are not just Zapatistas, but also the rest of the campesinos not affiliated with the EZLN, also beneficiaries of the plural management of the Caracoles.

## II

Natural Resources: *a casus belli* (an occurrence giving rise to war). The counterinsurgency policies were structured in 1995 in spite of the recurring sessions of the San Andrés dialogue, defined in the two volumes of the Irregular War Manual edited by the National Defense Ministry (Sedena, its initials in Spanish). Its military theory remembers what Mao said about: “the people are to the guerrilla what the water is to the fish,” but prefers another tactic: “one can make life in the water (in the campesino communities) impossible for the fish, agitating, introducing elements prejudicial to their subsistence, or the most predatory fish who will attack them, persecute them and obligate them to disappear or to run away from the danger of being eaten by these voracious and aggressive fish” (Volume II, number 547). The grouping of these fish (the predatory, aggressive and voracious ones) are the paramilitary groups designated as “armed civilians.”

Effectively, Sedena emptied the water from the communities, it penetrated them. The most predatory fish are not external agents like before (the episodic hired guns, who returned to live in the cities after fulfilling their promise), nor *guardias blancas* (an exogenous elite which would disappear after their crimes); they are, to the contrary, indigenous people from the communities who “work” full time on site. The first ones were organized as the AntiZapatista Revolutionary Indigenous Movement (MIRA, its initials in Spanish), whose behavior was very discreet. This new formula needs financing, which, being official, must be justified with noble causes: in this case the “revolution.” Others continue with more constancy, whose initials are decorated with “development,” of “peace” or with “human rights” like Paz y Justicia, recruited within the PRI, whose laboratory was the state’s Northern Zone, and its victims were many prisoners and displaced. So much violence and new times stirred up splits, whose members are peppered within the bosom of the PRD, the Indigenous Campesino Regional Union (URCI) and, from the heart of the Jungle in Taniperlas, the Organization for the Defense of Indigenous and Campesino Rights (Opddic, its initials in Spanish), created by the MIRA’s founder, is the new launching pad of the current presidential term in the Jungle.

These old/new most predatory fish, like the folkloric “Mapaches” and “Pinedistas” of the Revolution who said they were Villistas, are also campesinos and indigenous peoples faithful to the old PRI owners or cattle ranchers and act as their canon fodder. Decorated with the noble causes of their initials, they now occupy 3 thousand hectares [Ed. more than 7,000 acres] of former national lands, from the North to the South by Nuevo Momón. As they offer land in their new ejidos, legalizable or already legalized, they drain many campesinos afflicted by agrarian insecurity but, different from the EZLN’s pluralist management (a world where many worlds fit; not dividing, uniting; not conquering, convincing; not supplanting, representing), once possessed of their new lands, the Opddic demands their adhesion. To

the recalcitrant ones, they take away their houses, harvests, or trucks, they are expelled and thus a new generation of displaced people is born.

In this reoccupied area, the most predatory fish break down the autonomous municipalities, threaten their alternative schools and clinics, contaminate land regenerated or reforested by Zapatista agroecology, make impossible the successful new fair market cooperatives without middlemen. In other words, a dismantling of the political path patiently constructed by the Caracoles. If the EZLN should defend their recuperated lands again as in the armed period of clandestinity, it would be considered that they violated the truce and the law on dialogue, and the EZLN would be blamed for conducting an internal war, the conflict would be classified as inter or intra community, indigenous communities against indigenous communities. It is the new face of the war with political masks, that of the deceptive initials of the most predatory fish.

Beyond this deceptive tactic, what is their strategy? To understand, the reverse of the first process we must begin with the projected purpose. The horizon is the privatization of the Jungle's natural resources, the Chiapas door to the biological corridor that goes with the Plan Puebla-Panama: the oil zone whose wells were tapped in 1993 with the EZLN's detection; the sweet waters of the Canyons' rivers and lakes; the timber wealth; the medicinal plants coveted by the pharmaceutical industry; the booty of vegetal diversity already biopirated (that is to say, already clandestinely exported or a candidate for genetic modification); the voluminous rivers, the landscapes and exotic animals for elitist adventure tourism. A bargain for the (foreign) accumulation of capital in the systemic financial and production crisis, easily excusable with an ecological discourse.

This wealth emphasized in the San Andrés Accords, territorialized by the recuperated lands, is that which the Army watches over with the pretext of a contention with the EZLN, as that which Andrés Barreda exemplified by mapping it: the gray zone and natural resources coincide in the same space. By remaining under the management of Zapatismo, their privatization would be impossible, but with the Opddic and the other most predatory fish's docility towards power, it becomes possible.

The means? The Salinas reform of constitutional article 27 and its regulatory law. By legalizing the reoccupation of their old owners through the Opddic's new ejidos, they are ipso facto privatizable through the Procede, still optional (which excludes that the Zapatista accept it) but already in gestation by Opddic's lawyers. In "better" times, the Caracoles, the autonomous municipalities and the Good government Juntas would become levels of government without territory and without bases, their schools without students, their clinics without patients, their agroecology crops genetically modified, and their alternative commerce without clients. By achieving the strategy, the Zapatistas would be unable to operate. And the indigenous and campesinos of the Opddic? Simple, they would become, inside of their own ejidos, peons of the transnationals installed on the lands, until now recuperated and now reoccupied, no longer by predatory fish but by fat fish: the new systemic operators of the latest capitalist wave.

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