

Marcos: An Other Theory?

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An Other Theory?

Long ago, the Guadalajara dawn found Elías Contreras, the EZLN's commissioner of investigations, sitting on one of the park benches in front of that cathedral which imposes its twofold power, the symbolic and the real, on the city of Guadalajara. Elías Contreras had come to this city in order to meet with the Ruso at his sandwich stall and, later, with the Chinese man Feng Chu in the public baths of the Mutualista, when he was involved in solving that unknown case of the Mal and the Malo.

For those who don't know, Elías Contreras was an EZLN support base, a war veteran, who helped the EZLN Comandancia General in what you call "detective" work and we call "investigation commission."

But, before the Ruso's disconcerting sandwiches and the Chino's taciturnity, Elías Contreras had been sitting on one of the park benches in this city centre of Guadalajara, scribbling sketches, odd phrases, complete paragraphs and imprecise lines in his notebook, while waiting for the sun to mottle the eastern wall of the cathedral.

I hadn't known of the existence of that kind of trip log or campaign journal in which Elías Contreras, paradoxically, hadn't written anything referring directly to that case in which love, that other love, came to him just as love does come, that is, where one least expects it. In his case accompanied by the confusion and fear which usually accompany an encounter with the other. The love which left him the way one always fears it will leave: by the irremediable path of death. Because, perhaps some might remember, La Magdalena fell fighting on our side, the zapatista side, against the Mal and the Malo. And she was our compañera in two ways: because she chose to be a woman and because she chose to be with us. But that's another history which we may, perhaps, find somewhere else.

Elías Contreras never said that he had fallen in love with La Magdalena, the transvestite who saved his life in the streets of Mexico City and who accompanied him in the pursuit of one Morales. He never said so openly, it's true, but anyone who learns to listen to words, silences, expressions and manners also knows how to find secrets whose existence isn't even suspected. And Elías Contreras, the EZLN's commissioner of investigations, spoke of La Magdalena through his silence about her, as if words would hurt her. I believe - it's something which occurs to me now - that those feelings which Elías Contreras harbored for La Magdalena were not returned in kind, and in some way that soothed the chaos provoked by that emotion.

But perhaps I might tell you about the now deceased Elías Contreras' hidden love for La Magdalena, and what there was about it in his notebook, at another time. Or perhaps I won't recount anything, because there are people who leave not only the manifesto of their death as weight, but they also leave us the secrets of their lives.

Now I would like to tell you about some parts of the notebook which Elías Contreras carried. The dawn often found us standing in front of the stove in his kitchen, and, when our silences stretched out long enough, Elías would take the crumpled notebook out of his rucksack and pass it to me without even looking at me or saying anything.

I approached it as a clumsy intruder would. It took just a quick glance to realize that only the author would be able to decipher what was written or sketched there. As if it were a jigsaw puzzle whose complete picture was unknown to everyone except to the one who had designed the pieces.

Sometimes I would read a phrase out loud, and he, Elías Contreras, would begin putting the pieces together. As if talking to himself, he would rework an anecdote or an argument.

There were, for example, those simple and concise principles of the guerrero which Elías Contreras must have copied from somewhere in almost illegible strokes:

1. The guerrero should always put himself at the service of a noble cause.
2. The guerrero should always be willing to learn and to do so.
3. The guerrero should respect his ancestors and care for their memory.
4. The guerrero should exist for the good of humanity, live for that, die for that.
5. The guerrero should cultivate the sciences and the arts and also, with them, to be the guardian of his people.
6. The guerrero should dedicate himself equally to things great and small.
7. The guerrero should look ahead, imagining everything already complete and finished.

Not at dawn, but one afternoon - as the sun was leaping from one cloud to another until it concealed itself behind a mountain - with his notebook in my hands, I read the following sentences to Elías Contreras, which he himself had written:

“Resistance is averting the fate which is being imposed from above, at just the right time, exerting the necessary force and thus destroying that disaster and those who are contriving it for us.”

Upon hearing it, Elías Contreras said: “Guadalajara, during the time of the Ruso and the Chino.” And he immediately told me that he had written that thought during the dawn when he was waiting in the centre of the Pearl of the West.

Another sentence followed. I read it aloud:

“The great minds who sell themselves for money lack intelligence, as they lack courage, shame and good manners. As the citizens say, they are mediocre, cowards, imbeciles and bad-mannered.”

Up above, Elías Contreras told me, looking down bitterly, they didn't just invent a religion where what counts is what you have and not what you are. They also make some into their priests, who write and

preach the doctrine of the powerful among those of above and among those of below. They are like priests, but also like the police and guards, seeing to it that we behave well, that we accept exploitation and we are like meek little ones, our minds saying “yes” or “no” according to the order. In other words, the powerful also mess with thinking. And those priests of the thoughts of those of above are the great minds who sell themselves to money.

“The intellectuals of above?” I asked.

“Those,” said Elías Contreras, commissioner of investigations for the EZLN, and, sitting on a tree trunk, looking towards the west, he repeated for me the argument he had constructed here in Guadalajara when he was following the trail of the Mal and the Malo in that still unfinished work of ours, of us, the neo-zapatistas.

I took the following notes from that argument which Elías Contreras expounded to me in Tzeltal and which, therefore, has words for which there are no equivalents in the dictionaries of the dominant and dominating idioms:

The Intellectuals of Above

If the police and the armies are the stewards of the citizenry’s good behavior in the face of seizure, exploitation and racism, then who looks after good behavior in intellectual thought and theoretical analysis?

If the legal system, which sees the violent imposition of capital as being “rational and human”, has judges, guards, police and jails, then what are their equivalent in the culture of Mexico, in research and academia, in theoretical work, analysis and in the debating of ideas?

Answer: The intellectuals above who say what is science and what is not, what is serious and what is not, what is debate and what is not, what is true and what is false. In sum, what is intelligent and what is not.

Capitalism doesn’t just recruit its intellectuals in the academy and in the culture, it also “manufactures” their sounding boxes and assigns them their territories. But what they have in common is their foundation: feigning humanism where there is only thirst for profits, presenting capital as the synthesis of historical evolution and offering the comforts of complicity through grants, paying for publicity and privileged colloquy. There is no appreciable difference between a self-help book and the magazines Letras Libres, Nexos, Quién? and TV and Novelas. Not in the writing, not in the price, not in their location in Carlos Slim Helu’s Sanborns. Except, perhaps, in that more of the latter two are sold and read. In the contents? All offer the impossible mirror to those who above are what they are.

The Intellectuals in the Middle

Just like in the impossible center of the impossible geometry of power, are those intellectuals in the fragile crystal towers of “neutrality” and “objectivity” who are navigating, flirting discreetly or blatantly with the system, without caring about the color of the one holding political power.

Looking above, these intellectuals answer the explicit or implicit question with which they start their

work: “From where?” And other questions are tied to this question: “Why?”, “With whom?”, “Against whom?”

From the threshold of power, on their best behavior in the mandarin court of the current administration, these intellectuals are not in the middle, but rather in transit to above. They put themselves on offer, with the tools of analysis and theoretical debate, at the banquets of political and economic power in Mexico, with a sign that reads: “Speeches made. Government programs justified. Businesspersons advised. Magazines produced at your pleasure. Entertainment provided for parties and for shareholders’ and cabinet meetings.”

Next to those intellectuals are the ones who, slowly or quickly, lose their principles, give in, and desperately search for an alibi which will save them in front of the mirror. They are the prudent, mature and sensible intellectuals who have put away the weapons of criticism for the blandishments of those who see their work of the right as being of the left.

But the dishonest position of these intellectuals who belong to the system doesn’t cease to amaze. The weak alibi of deliberate, rational and responsible change isn’t enough to sanctify that den of thieves which is the self-styled electoral left. They clothe themselves in the fragile transience of the media and in that way they conceal not only their lack of principles, but also their renunciation of all critical analysis of the political class. Beset by the ghosts their prudence has created, they confirm their profound contempt for intelligence.

And there are the ones who say they belong to the radical left and are even zapatistas (certainly in the same way Guajardo says he’s a zapatista). From the comforts of the academy they set themselves up as the new judges, the neo-commissars of good manners in the debate on what AMLO’s irresistible ascent in democratic modernity – in the polls, that is – really means.

They are the ones who say that any criticism of the political class promotes abstention, and with Thomist logic, that that will help the right. The ones who choose and edit national reality in order to present the unrepresentable. The ones who remain silent in the face of the way the municipal president of Tulancingo, Hidalgo, of the PRD, treats indigenous and senior citizens. In the face of the frenzied leap by the PAN and the PRI into the open arms of the PRD anywhere in the nation. In the face of the nepotism of the PRD city halls in Tabasco. In the face of the selling of their franchise to the current cacique of any state. In the face of the approval of laws of neoliberal destruction by the sol azteca wing. In the face of the suspicious similarity of first and last names on the lists of PRD candidates to those of PRI and PAN ones of days gone by.

They are the same ones who want us to swallow the millstone that we have to put up with the macro-economic program, at the same time the macro-political changes.

They are the same ones who sell the illustrious “retirement to home.” The increasingly lesser evil is the only – comfortable – option.

They are the same ones who shamelessly say that the government is protecting the Other Campaign so that it will attack López Obrador, while various police forces are photographing, watching and harassing members of the karavana, state, regional and local coordinators. The same ones who feel a profound contempt for their readers and who, without any shame whatsoever, say that Rosario Robles is a heroine one day and on the next if they see her they don’t remember her.

They are the same ones who discredited the young students of the CGH who, in 1999-2000, managed to keep the UNAM as a public and free university with their movement. The same ones who silently applauded the repression of young altermundistas in that disgrace to the Jalisco calendar which is May 28, 2004.

They are the same ones who sigh with delight for the Segundo Pisos, the bullet train, the trans-isthmus project, the co-investors in Pemex and in the electricity industry, Mexico's entrance into major league baseball, the concerts in the Zócalo in Mexico City, the privilege of colloquy with officials.

Ah! Finally a high-class, Segundo Piso, scene, so we don't see, or we pretend not to see, those of below, the provocateurs, the hyper, the pelos parados, the rebels, the commoners, the wretched, those of below.

Who cares if the same ones are in the politics of above and if it's the same "macro-economic" program as before? Who pays attention to that minutia? Who is worried that the program represents the continuation and deepening of the destruction of the Mexican nation?

They are the same ones who offer the calamity of not being satisfied with what is, man, nor do you have to be too demanding, man, whether Madrazo or Calderón, whether the PRI or the PAN, well, what would the foreign nations say? The big investors, man, well, they already understand, now we just need those of below to understand, to obey. But everything's all wrapped up, man, it's ours, man. Now we really did do it. A consultancy, trips, meals, rubbing shoulders with the big shots.

They are the ones who carry their leaking buckets of water to confront the promise written in Guanajuato: "There are still a lot of corn exchanges to set on fire." They're the ones with the thin skins who crack at the first criticism, and they scream their heads off, doling out labels like "intolerant", "Stalinists", "ultras", "outdated", "immature."

The intellectuals in the middle... While the Other says "wake up", those intellectuals say, beseech, beg, implore: "Stay asleep."

The Other Intellectuals

From below and from the left, a movement which is building itself, the Other is also building new realities. We neo-zapatistas think these new realities, which are already emerging, and which will go on appearing further ahead, need another theoretical reflection, another debate of ideas.

This places demands on the other intellectuals. First, the humility to recognize that they are facing something new. And, secondly, to join in, to embrace the other, to learn about themselves through it and to come to know the indigenous, the worker, the campesino, the young person, the woman, the child, the old one, the teacher, the student, the employee, the homosexual, lesbian and transgender person, the sex worker, the street vendor, the small shopkeeper, the Christian base, the street worker, the other.

We think they should participate directly in the meetings of supporters in their states and, in addition, listen to what all the supporters throughout the country are saying. Thanks to the alternative media, the other media, it is possible to closely follow this beautiful lesson in contemporary national history. In their way and with their means, the other intellectuals will certainly produce analysis and theoretical debates which will astonish the world.

As zapatistas we think that the Other Campaign can proudly say that it deserves this country's best intellectuals to be part of it. Now they will say, with their own work, whether they are deserving of the Other Campaign.

The Missing Word

In the old and battered notebook of Elías Contreras, the EZLN's commissioner of investigation, there is an errant page, carefully folded, where it reads:

There are stones which are still silent. When they speak the secrets they keep, nothing will be the same again, but it will surely be better for everyone. The being and not the having will be valued. Another hand will raise the flag, and the world will be scented, will be heard, will know and will feel as it should be: the honourable home of those who work it.

Another Vigil for Shadow

Dawn. Above, the moon continues her pale disrobing of the blue which clothes her. The dark is forgiving of scars and generously offers her another veil for her shamelessness. Below, shadow curls up in the last corner of his sleeplessness.

Is that a wind rising up or a bridge, seeking the faraway riverbank in order to complete its reach?

A sigh, perhaps.

And once again the half-sleep and its illusions: a streamer, yearning and wrapped around an absent neck, longing rising and falling in the lower abdomen, the faint breathing of shadow in the ear of the night, desire clothing the dark of the half-light, a long and damp kiss on other lips, the hand writing a letter which will never reach its destination:

I would give anything to be entangled between your legs, to mingle our damp, to exhaust myself in the cleft moon of your hips. I would give anything, except giving up doing what it's my duty to do.

Dawn breaks.

The sun is beginning to help the houses and buildings in their languorous bowing to the west.

The other Jalisco is honing word and tuning ear.

Outside they are asking:

"Are you ready?"

Inside, shadow carefully folds the longing, puts it in the left pocket of his shirt, close to his heart, and answers:

"Always."

From the other Guadalajara.

Subcomandante insurgente Marcos