

THE ORIGINS OF THE ZAPATISTA NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (EZLN)



Reuters

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INTRODUCTION

A great deal has been written about the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) following their January 1, 1994 assault on several towns in eastern Chiapas. These actions and the just cause of their struggle garnered tremendous media attention and widespread public support both within Mexico and internationally. However, significantly less has been published regarding the EZLN's roots and organizational structure prior to 1994. This essay is an attempt to synthesize existing information in order to detail the movement's antecedents.

It is imperative to note that the focus on pre-EZLN formations is not meant to detract from or diminish the ultimate importance of the EZLN's transformation into an indigenous-controlled body. Though it is not the goal of this essay to depict that transformation, the reader must remain aware that the uniqueness of the Zapatista movement lay in its ability to abandon an archaic, hierarchical, militaristic organizing model and adopt the indigenous concept of 'command obeying' ('Command obeying' is defined as the notion that those leading should be subjected to the rule of those who have put them in the position of leadership.)

Navigating through the existing material regarding EZLN forebears and their classical revolutionary concepts is a precarious endeavor. Not only do the handful of writers addressing this topic have contrasting views, but the early EZLN formations have yet to be examined methodically, carefully and thoroughly. Some writers have argued that the EZLN opportunistically embraced indigenous concepts as a matter of survival. They claim that the Western socialist construct of the non-indigenous Zapatistas was forced to change as a result of the collapse of Soviet Communism and the conversion of several Latin American guerrilla groups into participatory political entities. The argument maintains that the indigenous concepts of dignity and direct democracy based on communal control of the decision making process provided the non-indigenous Zapatistas with a model to salvage an outdated movement.

Such is the basis of Carlos Tello's flawed but important work, *La rebelión de las Cañadas*. It appears that Tello, whose father was the director of the Indigenous National Institute (INI), had access to confidential State security files. While supplying some of the best material regarding early EZLN history, Tello neglects to provide sources for much of his information and refuses to account for the EZLN's indigenous transformation (Harvey 1998). *La rebelión de las Cañadas* appeared in February 1995 at the exact moment when then-President Ernesto Zedillo launched a fresh military offensive against the Zapatistas. Concurrently, Zedillo revealed the presumed identities of several past and present EZLN leaders. Despite the value of the insightful information provided in Tello's book, it ultimately served as a propaganda tool for Zedillo's aggression. Tello's account revealed the non-indigenous roots of the first EZLN cadres. The administration opportunistically misused this information in an attempt to support its claim that 'foreigners' and non-indigenous Mexicans were inciting rebellion in Chiapas.

One scholar who has relied heavily on Tello's material is eminent Harvard historian John Womack, Jr., author of the definitive *Zapata and The Mexican Revolution*. In parts of his book, *Rebellion in Chiapas*, Womack portrays the primary organizations that slowly evolved into the EZLN. (Curiously, Womack was Carlos Salinas' doctoral advisor during his Ph.D. candidacy at Harvard and has always treated the Salinas presidency with a paternal kindness.)

Another politically motivated source of pre-EZLN history is a former *Le Monde* correspondent, Bertrand de la Grange. His diatribe against Marcos, *The Genial Imposter*, was used by the government to disparage the Zapatistas after the Acteal Massacre (Ross 2000). However, he did conduct valuable interviews with several significant members involved in initial EZLN organizing efforts. Without access to historical archives and in depth analysis, de la Grange's interviews provide an important, often overlooked, perspective on early EZLN activities.

Additionally, I relied on John Ross' two volumes, *Rebellion from the Roots* and *The War Against Oblivion* to provide historical context and chronology. Ross' work is highly insightful, yet he also fails to provide sources for most of his material.

Finally, many other works provided key insights into the multi-dimensional aspects of social organizing and radical movements in Chiapas' long, turbulent history. Neil Harvey's *The Chiapas Rebellion* was especially useful.

ZEDILLO'S ARCHITECT

In October 1995, the Mexico City federal police publicly announced the detention of a middle-aged architect by the name of Fernando Yañez on weapons and drug possession charges. Then-president Ernesto Zedillo claimed that Yañez was the infamous "Comandante Germán," the mastermind behind the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional or Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). The Zapatista leadership, including the highly visible and verbose Subcomandante Marcos, denied knowledge of this particular "Germán," declared a 'Red Alert' and retreated to their jungle hideouts, fearing renewed government aggression (Ross 2000: 147-148).

In the ongoing propaganda war, Zedillo was determined to prove that the Zapatista uprising, which stunned Mexico on January 1, 1994, was not initiated and directed by the indigenous Mayan population of eastern Chiapas. In fact, the government claimed that the non-indigenous Yañez and his cadre of pro-Cuban revolutionaries had infiltrated the indigenous communities of that impoverished state as early as 1972 and slowly prepared a small portion of the population for their startling assault 22 years later.

As quickly as Yañez was arrested, charges were dropped, and upon release he instantly offered to help broker a peaceful solution between the Zapatistas and the government. His offer ignored, Yañez has not been seen or heard from since (Ross 2000: 148).

Answers to just who Yañez is and why he would be in any position to offer conflict mediation only begin to emerge with a journey back in time and place to the other end of this inverted comma known as Mexico.

MONTERREY AND THE FLN

The Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional or Forces of National Liberation (FLN), an obscure Mexican insurgent group, emerged from an even lesser known group, the Ejército Insurgente Mexicano or the Mexican Insurgent Army (EIM). Secretly organized by a prominent journalist in the late 1960s, the EIM engaged in a minor guerrilla action in Chiapas before vanishing (Womack 1999: 190). In August 1969, nine EIM members reappeared in Monterrey, capital of the northern state of Nuevo León, forming the nucleus of the FLN (de la Grange 1997).

The all-male FLN membership consisted of mostly middle-class graduates from the State University of Nuevo León. In preparation for a socialist revolution they busied themselves stockpiling weapons and securing safe houses. However, they refused to engage in the bank robbing and kidnapping activities of other urban guerrillas who had emerged as a result of the 1968 military massacre of peaceful student protesters at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico (UNAM) (Hodges 1995).

Ideologically the FLN were anti-Soviet, pro-Cuban Guevaristas led by the 26-year-old César Germán Yañez, Fernando's older brother. Director of the local Mexican-Cuban Cultural Institute, César also taught law at the University of Nuevo León.

Apparently known to the Mexican security apparatus for coordinating clandestine cells in other large cities, the FLN's Nuevo León headquarters were raided by state police in 1971. César, now using the *nom de guerre* "Pedro" and several others escaped, and by early 1972 had made their way back to eastern Chiapas. After securing some land in the Lacandón jungle they established training grounds for the Emiliano Zapata Guerrilla Nucleus, a precursor of the EZLN (Womack 1999: 190).

Throughout this period state security forces maintained surveillance on FLN activities and in 1974 raided another Monterrey safe house. Two members were captured and their forced confessions led to an assault on FLN headquarters near Mexico City. There, Pedro's second in command was killed along with four other FLN members. Finally, the crushing blow was delivered in Chiapas when army and federal police attacked the Lacandón training camp killing Pedro and four additional comrades (Womack 1999: 190-191, Ross 1995: 273, La Botz 1995, 38).

REBUILDING IN MEXICO CITY

The FLN appeared decimated, yet three members managed to convene in Mexico City, beginning the process of organizational reconstruction. The three included the FLN's communications specialist ("Alfredo"), the Veracruz unit leader ("Juan"), and Fernando Yañez.

After studying architecture at the University of Nuevo León and completing his guerrilla training in the same locale, Fernando was charged with the activities of the FLN cell in Tabasco. The close proximity to the Lacandón was conducive to Fernando's frequent visits to Pedro. Now, with his brother dead, Fernando busied himself with FLN survival, recruitment and expansion.

1976 witnessed the revitalization of several old cells, but the organization suffered another blow when Alfredo died from injuries sustained during an accident. Fernando accepted the organization's leadership position and Juan assumed second-in-command (Tello 1995). By the time the Sandinistas emerged victorious from the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution, the FLN had active units in the Federal District, Nuevo León, Veracruz, Tabasco, Puebla, México and Chiapas. For the next 13 years, under the leadership of Fernando and Juan, the FLN prepared for a classic revolutionary socialist struggle throughout Mexico. FLN recruits were organized and drilled under the banner of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (Womack 1999: 191).

BACK IN CHIAPAS: BISHOP RUIZ AND THE PROLETARIAN LINE

It was in Chiapas that the FLN sank its deepest roots. But so had other groups before them. The Catholic Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, under the progressive leadership of Bishop Samuel Ruiz, had been actively organizing indigenous communities in the eastern part of the state. Since the early 1970s, Ruiz had been visiting communities, training catechists and implementing the basic tenet of liberation theology, i.e., a 'preferential option for the poor' (MacEoin 1996). In this case the poor were synonymous with the Mayan populations spread throughout the highlands, canyons and jungles of eastern Chiapas.

Many of these impoverished communities became militantly radicalized and, as such, attracted the attention of various factions of the Mexican left. One such leftist group, the Maoist inspired Línea Proletaria or Proletarian Line (LP) arrived in Chiapas at the beginning of 1979. The LP formed in Mexico City earlier that decade under the

leadership of an economics professor, Adolfo Orive¹, described as "arguably the most remarkable organizer of his generation" (Womack 1999: 175). The Maoist populist ideology of "go to the people, learn from the people" became the LP's operational model. Orive organized brigades in which the decision-making process was controlled from below by assemblies of students, campesinos and city workers (La Botz 1995: 32-34, Hodges 1995: 194-195, Ross 1995: 274-276).

Spreading into other northern states, LP members organized rural communities and poor urban areas by living and working with targeted populations, creating local leadership, and involving all through collective decision-making methods (Womack 1999: 34, Hodges 1995). The LP's decision-making model, known as *Política Popular* or People's Politics, impressed many others engaged in similar efforts, including Bishop Ruiz of San Cristóbal.

Ruiz met with some LP organizers at the behest of the Bishop of Torreón in 1976. He was in that northern city to help secure the release of a priest imprisoned for working with the Maoists. The Bishop of Torreón was so enthralled with the methods of *Política Popular* that he urged Ruiz to invite an LP brigade to Chiapas (Ross 1995: 275, Womack 1999: 33-34, 173-181). Ruiz, in dire need of additional organizing support in the Lacandón region, agreed and an LP cadre soon appeared in San Cristóbal declaring that they would "take charge" of the area's political organizing.

The LP quickly assessed the socio-political situation and, in areas where established organizations existed, initiated their own *Política Popular* process. Before long they were entrenched in communities that belonged to existing organizations like the Ocosingo Union of Ejidos. Spreading throughout the highlands and canyon areas of the Lacandón, the LP established control over a large number of communities and, in 1980, created the Union of Unions representing 156 communities and 10,000 families (Womack 1999: 34, Harvey 1999). Suddenly, this newly LP-led organization was the major indigenous-campesino power in the region and Ruiz' diocese was threatened with a massive loss of influence.

Interestingly, the LP-controlled Union of Unions worked with the government, winning privileges to administer significant sums from a federal rural credits program. Throughout this period of expanding land takeovers by increasingly radical indigenous-campesino organizations, the LP found itself managing government-conceived

¹ Orive's subsequent history is strange yet typical of many Mexican leftists. He had been an "inspiring" teacher to Carlos Salinas in 1968-69. By the mid-90s he had been fully co-opted by the long ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and within the Party's campesino confederation, the CNC, he headed training programs. Then, immediately following the Acteal Massacre in 1996, President Zedillo's newly appointed Interior Secretary, Francisco Labastida named Orive as his chief advisor. By this time Orive had negated his past ("I had been mistaken on the paradigm") and was vehemently anti-Ruiz and anti-EZLN (Le Botz 1995: 32, Womack 1999: 176, Ross 1995: 275-276, Ross 2000: 6, 247).

productivity incentives and marketing schemes (Womack 1999: 34-35, Harvey 1999: 88-90).

Although growing suspicious of LP influence and power, Ruiz also realized that their organizational methods were furthering the Church's goal of demolishing "the structures of domination" (Ross 1995: 277).

THE CHURCH AND THE FLN

Ruiz and his co-workers understood the need to reestablish their diminished authority. They wished to continue the pattern of LP success but without LP dominance. Lázaro Hernández, one of Ruiz' brightest catechists, was 24 years old when the Catholic communities around Ocosingo elected him 'deacon of deacons' in 1979. Ousted from his secretarial position in the Union of Unions when the LP seized control in 1980, the indigenous Hernández helped form an indigenous group of catechists known as Roots. In response to the LP's expanding control, Roots sought to create and then synthesize opposition (Ross 2000: 49, Womack 1999: 35, de la Grange).

Seeking to regain the initiative lost to the LP's Union of Unions, Roots began an active search for experienced organizations with which to join forces. Two progressive and popular organizations were ruled out due to their overt Communist and/or anti-clerical stances.²

The FLN offered the only viable alternative and Hernández seized the opportunity. In 1980, he established a relationship with the primary FLN officer in the region, José Santiago Santiago. Santiago was a graduate of the San Cristóbal seminary, an ex-theology student and an aide during the momentous 1973-74 San Cristóbal Indian Congress. Soon to be known by his *nom de guerre* "Jacobo", Santiago labored as a social worker in Ocosingo simultaneously recruiting indigenous activists for FLN organizing in the Lacandón area (Ross 2000, Tello 1995, Womack 1999: 191).

By 1982, the FLN, still a clandestine organization, had several members engaged in public social work. These cadres operated a series of successful social programs in the hotbed of one of the poorest indigenous municipalities, San Andrés Larráinzar. A year later, Jacobo became the regional director of the small non-governmental organization, Social-Economic Development of the Indigenous Mexicans (DESMI), administrating these programs. His partner, Comandante "Elisa", managed DESMI's public health program.

² The Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos (CIOAC) was Communist while the Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata (OCEZ) was closely aligned with a fiercely anti-Catholic public school teachers movement (Womack 1999, Collier, 1999: 70-74).

Interactions between Jacobo and Hernández led to Hernández' contacting FLN organizers believing that they would prove useful in the implementation of the Church's liberation goals. Hernández found the relationship viable, and DESMI and Roots effectively collaborated in communities around San Cristóbal.

Ruiz, his priests, and catechists, pleased with the affiliation, were not aware of the FLN's violent past or armed revolutionary intentions. Ruiz and others in his diocese cooperated with the local FLN leadership in their mutual support of indigenous struggles. During this period, the FLN had yet to initiate its armed forces, the EZLN, in Chiapas. That was about to change.

FLN MOVES INTO THE LACANDÓN AGAIN

In November 1983, the national FLN leadership arrived in Chiapas ready to embark upon the process of creating their military apparatus. They returned with new names to match their escalation of efforts. Fernando Yañez became Comandante "Germán" in honor of his fallen brother. Juan became "Rodrigo". With them appeared a "brilliant young Captain "Zacarías"" who would soon take the new *nom de guerre* "Marcos" (Womack 1999: 191, Ross 1995).

Marcos has stated that, in addition to the FLN leadership, 12 FLN cadres entered the Lacandón canyons that November. Seven promptly left to work in "another area" while others could not adjust to the living conditions and returned to the cities. Marcos and two others stayed. About a year later, one of the two was killed at an Ocosingo Police checkpoint. It is believed that in honor of this fallen comrade, "Zacarías" took his name and became "Marcos" (Ross 1995: 278).

Conceptualized as the armed component of a tripartite FLN structure, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and its functions were defined as far back as 1980. An internal FLN document from that time specified that the EZLN would, in the Marxist jargon of the day, "link the FLN with the working masses in the countryside" while dictating "measures and local rules for the benefit of the population that inhabits the zone, above all the workers." Most importantly, the EZLN was "to liberate the territory where it operates in order to install in these zones people's revolutionary authorities." This final objective has been realized in the 1,111 autonomous communities that currently comprise Zapatista territory and where authority flows from indigenous communal control, customs and law.

THE EZLN TAKES HOLD

Germán and Rodrigo left the Lacandón in 1984 placing Comandante Elisa in charge of the newly inaugurated "Southern Combat Front." Elisa, moving from her post at DESMI,

was one of the few survivors of the 1974 police attack in Chiapas, which decimated the organization and left the original Germán dead (de la Grange 1997). Now, under her supervision and direction, contacts with the Union of Unions flourished. By this time, the LP had exited Chiapas and the FLN quickly filled the void by organizing the Union of Unions' resistance to armed aggression by local landowners and their paramilitary forces (Hodges 1995: 193).

Hernández, the deacon of deacons, had met Elisa through Jacobo. Working in an indigenous community (Tierra y Libertad) in the Lacandón canyons, he began coordinating organizing efforts with Elisa who then established FLN headquarters just outside his community (Womack 1999: 37, 192, Tello 1995, de la Grange). With Hernández' direction the community formed armed guards for self-defense.

Under Comandante Elisa three captains rose in rank to become Subcomandantes: Marcos, the most senior, Daniel and Pedro (Tello 1995). Working with the expanding self-defense units, Marcos and the others began active formation of the EZLN forces by recruiting and training indigenous insurgents while securing arms and ammunition.

Throughout this period of community organizing and armed instruction a more profound transformation was taking root. The FLN-EZLN leadership and its very concept of revolutionary struggle were being fundamentally altered from below as the indigenous communities established control over the military preparations (Holloway, *et al* 1998).

A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP - PART I

For four years, from 1984 until 1988, Comandante Elisa led the successful and rapid expansion of organizing efforts in the canyon regions. By 1988 she and Jacobo had separated. She married another FLN insurgent and had become pregnant.³ Germán relieved her of command due to her pregnancy and appointed Marcos to coordinate the regional efforts (Womack 1999: 192, Tello 1995). Steadily, Marcos, with Daniel and Pedro, continued to build and drill the EZLN forces. By 1989, at least on the ground and with Marcos' absolute support, the original FLN practice of a vertical, militaristic leadership had been transformed into leadership by indigenous communal control.

In 1992 the communities informed Marcos of their readiness for war. Inhabiting a position between the *ladino* FLN leadership and the indigenous communities, Marcos at first sought to dissuade the indigenous from their decision. He argued that the time was

³ Elisa, 31, married the then 25-year-old Javier Elorriaga. Elorriaga graduated from UNAM in 1987 with an honors thesis on "Geopolitics and Revolutionary Change in Central America." Joining the FLN that same year, he was assigned to the Chiapas cadre. By 1995 he found himself serving as Marcos' contact during secret negotiations with the Interior Minister. However, during Zedillo's offensive in February 1995, Elorriaga was arrested and incarcerated until June 1996. Upon release, Marcos immediately placed him at the head of the Zapatista political arm, the Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional or the Zapatista Front of National Liberation (FZLN) (Womack 1999: 327-328).

not right due to certain global political factors such as the fall of communist states and the erosion of guerilla movements throughout Latin America. However, the Zapatista communities were convinced that their decision was correct telling Marcos "[w]e don't want to know what's happening in the rest of the world. We are dying and we have to ask the people. Didn't you say that we must do what the people say?' 'Well, ... yes.' 'Well then, let's ask them.'" (Harvey 1999: 197).

An opportunity for a "dry run" occurred when the communities helped organize a peaceful march to San Cristóbal on the 500th anniversary of indigenous resistance, October 12, 1992. Without masks, 5000 indigenous members of the EZLN joined thousands of other indigenous protestors and marched through the city eventually toppling a statue of the Spanish conquistador Diego de Mazariegos, founder of San Cristóbal (Ross 1995: 81-82). Marcos was there, videotaping the event in preparation for the future occupation of the provincial capital. Following the march, the indigenous communal assemblies reaffirmed their war decision, and Marcos, as head of the armed forces, was given one year to organize the military effort (Harvey 1999: 198).

In January 1993, in the community of Prado, a fierce debate raged amongst the *ladino* FLN leadership over whether to attack the Mexican State at this time. Comandante Rodrigo (ex-Juan) argued against war because, among other reasons, FLN forces in other parts of Mexico were not ready and therefore a multi-pronged, multi-state attack was not possible (Tello 1995). Rodrigo argued, and Elisa agreed, that if the Chiapas-based EZLN attacked and other FLN forces around the country could not strike in a coordinated effort, then the Chiapas insurgents would face the full force of the Mexican army.

Conversely, Marcos, representing the communities' decision, argued that the situation demanded imminent military action. He complained that Rodrigo's stance did not reflect the entire truth of the situation. EZLN membership was shrinking because Bishop Ruiz and his workers, successfully organizing in the same areas, opposed all armed movements. By this time Hernández had severed his ties with the EZLN due to Marcos' atheistic stance (Ross 2000). Additionally, other communities where the EZLN had maintained strong support were beginning to fissure with the injection of large amounts of new government social service funds. Finally, Marcos confirmed that the Mexican army was already becoming aware of the EZLN's military preparations and the element of surprise would not remain on the side of the insurgents much longer (Tello 1995).

At last, Marcos, along with Pedro and Daniel, persuaded Germán. Rodrigo left the meeting and the FLN. Germán was now the leadership's only survivor from the organization's rebuilding period in the mid-1970s.

A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP - PART II

The FLN structure, which had been intact since 1980, underwent a transformation after the Prado debate. With the organization renamed as the Partido de las Fuerzas de

Liberación Nacional (PFLN) in early 1993, Germán retained the top positions of secretary general, interior secretary and commander in chief of the EZLN (Womack 1999: 192). Shifting control away from *ladino* leadership, Marcos consolidated indigenous control of the military structure by securing official PFLN recognition of the preexisting Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee (CCRI). In place for several years, the CCRI directed the EZLN's organizing efforts. To this day it remains an elected group of individuals representing communities coordinated under the EZLN. These representatives command the military structure and are, in turn, controlled by their communal assemblies. Therefore, all decisions emanate directly from the indigenous communities themselves, as did the decision to proceed with the armed uprising (Hodges 1995, 196-197).

The PFLN was short lived. In September 1993, with the power and legitimacy of the CCRI behind him, Marcos replaced Germán and handed official control of the EZLN to the CCRI. By this time the EZLN and its command structure were completely subordinate to the indigenous CCRI. Marcos had the support of an indigenous army, while Germán would not be heard from again until Zedillo had him snatched off a Mexico City street two years later.⁴

EPILOGUE: WHO IS MARCOS?

At the same time that Zedillo exposed Comandante Germán as Fernando Yañez, he made public the "true" identity of the man behind the mask of Subcomandante Marcos. The government claimed that Marcos was an ex-university professor named Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente. According to the government, Guillén was born forty-three years ago in Tampico, Tamaulipas. The son of a furniture store owner, Guillén has six siblings. He attended Jesuit schools before taking his philosophy doctorate at UNAM in the early 1980s.

Guillén then taught at Mexico City's Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) Xochimilico campus, a "magnet for subversive artists, would-be guerilla fighters, and sharp-tongued political thinkers." He was known for his "sharp intellect and infectious verbosity." (Stavans: 2000, 189)

⁴ In February 2001, as the Zapatistas embarked upon their historic march for Indigenous rights, Fernando Yañez (a.k.a., Comandante Germán) made a triumphant return to public life. The Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee (CCRI), recognizing Yañez as "someone who has devoted his entire life to transforming the living conditions of the Mexican poor", named him "an intermediary" between the Zapatista delegation and government officials willing to discuss "constitutional recognition of Indigenous rights and culture." In a communiqué detailing his role, the CCRI acknowledged that Yañez remains "threatened with an arrest warrant, accused of being part of the EZLN leadership" but has accepted to "run the risks involved in the struggle for the recognition of Indigenous rights... We are, therefore, welcoming him and letting him know that it is an honor for us to have people of his human stature by our side." (Communiqué from the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee - General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army: February 2001).

Guillén's dissertation contains striking similarities in tone and style to the communiqués that have endeared Marcos to the Mexican public. The Mexican social critic, Ilan Stavans, who was a student at UAM when Guillén taught there, has noted that Marcos' literary style, "full of postscripts and qualifications and references to high and low..." fits perfectly with the then-current "post modern tongue and the often hallucinatory verbiage at Xochimilico." (Stavans: 2000, 187)

The government claims it identified Marcos through a 13-page declaration made by Salvador Morales Garibay, a.k.a. Subcomandante Daniel. The government asserts that Morales Garibay was a colleague of Guillén at UAM and followed him to Chiapas where they eventually parted ways over the decision to go to war (Ross: 2000, 108). The Zapatista command claims they have never heard of Morales Garibay.

Humorously, Marcos has denied the government's version of his past. "I've only been in Tamaulipas one time and that was when I had a job as a bouncer in a whorehouse near Ciudad Victoria." To the Mexican official who displayed on national television a picture of a bearded, scruffy, serious-looking Guillén with a super-imposed ski mask to illustrate his Zapatista-likeness, Marcos responded that he wished the government would find a more handsome candidate so as not to ruin his "correspondence from females."

Is it more important to know the minute details of Marcos' identity or to comprehend the Zapatista vision of dignity and struggle? Obviously the Mexican government and security agencies worldwide believe they need to unmask the Subcomandante. However, Marcos has his own opinion: "Marcos is gay in San Francisco, a black in South Africa, Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Isidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, an indigenous person in the streets of San Cristóbal, a gang member in Neza, a rocker on campus, a Jew in Germany, an ombudsman in the Department of Defense, a feminist in a political party, a communist in the post-Cold War period... In other words, Marcos is a human being in this world. Marcos is every untolerated, oppressed, exploited minority that is resisting and saying 'Enough!'" (Bardacke, *et al.*: 1995)

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