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A World of Many Walks? Zapatista World Ordering between Center and Margins

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At the current moment of multiple global crises, including of the International Liberal Order, a search for new practices of world ordering seems to coexist with a deep skepticism regarding the possibilities of global solidarity and common struggles between centers and margins. Against this background, this paper focuses on the world ordering practices of the Mexican Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, a group that occupies a position between center(s) and margin(s). While they clearly self-identify as being on the political and economic margins—geographically remote, economically weak and under constant threat of military repression—their ideas occupied center stage in the search for alternative visions of world order at least for a certain moment. The paper will explore the potential pathologies that a recourse to Zapatism may entail, namely romanticization, hollowing-out and epistemic extractivism/opportunism. It then asks if and how these pathologies can be overcome in a search for common ground for both social movements and International Political Theory when trying to think differently about world ordering from the margins. In this exploration, special emphasis will be given to the pathways toward a desirable order that the Zapatistas conceptualize and practice, namely creating, narrating and walking.

Actuellement, face aux multiples crises mondiales, notamment de l'ordre libéral international, une recherche de nouvelles pratiques d'organisation mondiale semble coexister avec un profond scepticisme quant aux possibilités d'une solidarité mondiale et de combats communs aux centres et aux marges. Sur cette toile de fond, cet article se concentre sur les pratiques d'organisation du monde de l'Armée zapatiste de libération nationale (EZLN), un groupe qui se place entre le(s) centre(s) et la/les marge(s). Bien qu'elle s'identifie clairement comme étant placée aux marges politiques et économiques (éloignement géographique, faiblesse économique et sous la menace constante d'une répression militaire), ses idées ont occupé le devant de la scène dans la recherche sur des visions alternatives à l'ordre mondial, au moins pendant un temps. Cet article analyse les pathologies potentielles qu'un recours au zapatisme induit, c'est-à-dire le romantisme, l'évidement et l'extractivisme/l'opportunisme systémique. Puis, il s'interroge sur la possibilité de surmonter ces pathologies par la quête d'un terrain commun aux mouvements sociaux et à la théorie politique internationale quand ils tentent d'imaginer différemment l'ordre mondial à partir des marges. Dans cette recherche, une attention particulière sera donnée aux chemins menant à un ordre souhaitable que les zapatistes conceptualisent et pratiquent, c'est-à-dire la création, la narration et la marche.

En el momento actual, de múltiples crisis globales, incluida la del Orden Liberal Internacional, la búsqueda de nuevas prácticas de ordenamiento mundial parece coexistir con un profundo escepticismo sobre las posibilidades de solidaridad global y las luchas comunes entre los centros y los márgenes. En este contexto, este artículo se centra en las prácticas de ordenamiento mundial del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) mexicano, un grupo que ocupa una posición entre el/los centro/s y el/los margen/es. Si bien se identifican claramente como personas situadas en los márgenes políticos y económicos (geográficamente remotas, económicamente débiles y bajo la amenaza constante de la represión militar), sus ideas ocuparon un lugar central en la búsqueda de visiones alternativas del orden mundial, al menos durante un cierto momento. Este artículo estudia las patologías potenciales que puede acarrear el recurso al zapatismo, a saber, la romantización, el vaciamiento y el extractivismo/oportunismo epistémico. A continuación, el artículo se pregunta, tanto si estas patologías pueden llegar a superarse cómo la forma en la que estas se pueden superar, en la búsqueda de un terreno común tanto para los movimientos sociales como para la Teoría Política Internacional cuando se trata de pensar de manera diferente sobre el ordenamiento mundial desde los márgenes. En este estudio, se dota de especial énfasis a los caminos que conducen hacia un orden deseable que los zapatistas conceptualizan y practican, a saber, crear, narrar y caminar.

Introduction

On January 1, 1994, the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) or Zapatista Army of National Liberation occupied administrative buildings in the South-Eastern Mexican state of Chiapas and declared war against the Mexican state and against neoliberal globalization. Ever since, the group has occupied a position between center(s) and margin(s). While its members clearly identify themselves as positioned on the political and economic margins—geographically remote, economically weak and under constant threat of military repression—their ideas occupied center stage in the search for alternative forms of world ordering, especially during the high times of neoliberal globalization and the search for more globally just alternatives in the nineteen nineties and early two-thousands.

They took issue with a certain pattern of what the introduction to this Special Forum (Quack et al. 2024) defines as the "kaleidoscope" of the International Liberal Order as it emerged after the end of the Cold War: By choosing the day on which the *North American Free Trade Agreement* entered into force as the moment of their appearance on stage, they already expressed a critique of trade liberalization and unrestricted global competition as one of the aspects of this pattern. However, theirs was not an isolated critique of economic liberalism, but a far deeper rejection of neoliberalism and colonial power structures and a demand for justice, democracy and freedom. Importantly, Zapatistas have not

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only developed a critique and alternative visions of world order but also started to imagine pathways toward the realization of these alternative visions (cf. Freistein et al. 2022). Based on these ambitions and practices, activists and scholars have credited the Zapatistas with attempting to "change the world without taking power" (Holloway 2010) and to engage in a "collective struggle not to conquer the world but to remake it" (Khasnabish 2010, 106).

In this paper, I will explore ideas and narratives proposed by the Zapatistas as a reservoir for thinking differently about world order which are potentially still relevant for both social movement activists and for International Political Theory (Shilliam 2021). Thereby, I also respond to recent calls to take activism and democratic politics beyond the state seriously as engagements with questions of world order (cf. Stone Tatum 2021, 1764). As was pointed out in the introduction to this Special Forum (Quack et al. 2024), retrieving such alternative perspectives is paramount in view of multiple crises, including the planetary and ecological boundaries that current forms of world order seem unable to address.

Attention to the "margins" of theory production has also been highlighted as part of efforts to decolonize the curriculum and widen the canon of Political Theory. In this context, the Afro-American political scientist Joseph L. Jones (2023) ascribed to a "diverse" Political Theory the task of questioning the status quo from the perspective of the marginalized. In order to concretize what this means he went back to a statement of his namesake Mack H. Jones, a founding member of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, who in 1969 pointed out: "Just as conventional American political science takes 'maintaining a stable commonwealth' as a point of beginning, the Black political scientist must begin with the need to subvert that order" (cited in Jones 2023, 127).

If we transfer this proposition to the question of world ordering, we may posit that diverse (International) Political Theory is not primarily about how to maintain global stability, e.g., based on the International Liberal Order, but how to critique it fruitfully. In line with the endeavor of this Special Forum, world ordering is understood here as a *process* that comprises criticizing existing worldwide patterned relationships and power relations, developing visions of desirable order, and working toward the (partial) realization of such visions (Quack et al. 2024). World ordering, in this sense, entails a political and moral performance of visualizing the state of the world that people want to overcome as well as the world they want to live in (Callahan 2020, 2), and importantly, engaging the pathways that connect the two.

The turn to the margins in search for alternative conceptions of world order in IR theorizing and beyond has recently sparked an intensified interest (Quack et al. 2024), especially with a view to alternative and non-linear temporalities (Hutchings 2007; Death 2022) and anthropologies (Sundberg 2014). In particular, renewed interest in the margins is linked to the urgent question of whether and how solidarities across differences and positionalities can be construed globally (Mohanty 2003; Anderl 2022) in times when aspirations for global justice have been criticized as reinforcing the division between "we the saviours" and "they the people" (Spivak 2009, 32), as well as building on global structures of domination (Dhawan 2013, 144).

Thus, while on the one hand, the turn to the margins is seen as urgent, there is also a growing skepticism as to the possibilities of building common ground and common struggles across differences and against the background of colonial oppression. Also, turning to the margins for fresh ideas bears the risk of fetishizing their alleged exotic nature or losing sight of their hybrid origin (Shilliam 2021). Appropriating the ideas, concepts and theories of those who write and speak from a position of multiple marginalization might also lead to uses that lose sight of the original contexts. What is more, strategic appropriations of marginal positionalities by the Global Right have been analyzed and warned against (Drolet and Williams 2022).

In the following reflections, I will first offer an overview of the Zapatistas' role between centers and margins and then give a structured account of Zapatista world-order conceptions, focusing on their critique of the status quo and their visions for an alternative world order. At the same time, I aim at problematizing the recourse to Zapatism with a view to three potential pathologies it might entail, namely romanticization, hollowing-out, and epistemic extractivism/opportunism. Against this background, I then turn to alternative ways of engaging with Zapatista world-order conceptions, taking as a starting point the pathways that the Zapatistas practice and theorize, in particular forms of *creating, narrating and walking*. While by no means a guarantee or a durable solution to the pathologies identified before, those pathways might potentially provide some guidance when aspiring to avoid them.

Methodologically, I aim at centering on the articulation of *experience* in its various dimensions. This focus also resonates with the emphasis placed on experience by bell hooks, whose thoughts are central to the conception of marginality in this special forum (Quack et al. 2024). She posits that living on the outskirts of a small Kentucky town as a Black American woman entailed an opportunity to grasp the existence of a universe made up of both margins and center and to develop a mode of thought that could "encompass a variety of human experiences" (2000 [1984], xvii). At the same time, as Chandra Mohanty (2003, 112) points out, it is important to avoid "the analytic elision between the experience of oppression and the opposition to it (which has to be based on the interpretation of experience)." As Charles Taylor (1985, 37) reminds us, the experience of reality is shaped by the symbols, ideas and discourses which are available in a given situation. At the same time, new experiences can alter the way we describe and interpret the world.

Thus, this contribution will focus on various dimensions of experience, based on the recognition that we do not have access to others and our own experiences directly, but via their interpretation and symbolic articulation as ideas (Leidhold 2023) and narratives (Czarniawska 2004; Mayer 2014; Shenhav 2015). When looking at narratives developed by groups on the margins of certain collectives, especially nations, the notion of counter-narratives, understood as narratives that run counter to the official and essentializing stories, becomes relevant (Bhabha 1990; cf. Meretoja 2021, 37). However, I also consider that embodied practices can be another way of articulating and sharing experiences (Sundberg 2014, Taylor 2015): Practices like moving, working, playing, and walking together with others in one place can allow for experiences of commonality and give rise to "affective communities of sense" (Callahan 2020, 314) in ways that do not exclusively depend on language (Sundberg 2014, 39). Walking, in particular, can be understood as an embodied practice that generates joint experiences in its own right (Cresswell 2010, 20; see also Youatt 2022, 6).

The sources that I will analyse comprise the *declaraciones* which the EZLN published between 1994 and 2005 since these were the formats in which the movement articulated its ideas most explicitly, attracting the most international attention. Beyond the declarations, I also turn to dif-

ferent media of articulation, namely the fictional stories told by Subcomandante Marcos featuring *El Viejo Antonio* (Subcomandante Marcos 1998). While those fictional expressions have started to receive some scholarly attention (Vanden Berghe 2005; Demuro and Holas Allimant 2020), most scholars have concentrated on the declarations. However, the fictional stories play a pivotal role in the ways in which the Zapatistas narrate and re-create the world (Holas Allimant and Demuro 2020). In exploring Zapatista practices of world ordering, in this paper, I aim to read them in parallel to and in dialogue with the declarations.

Zapatism between Center and Margins

As already mentioned, the Zapatistas entered the stage of worldwide attention with their "declaration of war" on January 1, 1994. While they deliberately chose the day that NAFTA entered into force as the moment of their global appearance, their opposition was not merely against free trade or globalization, but far more ambitious and based on a much older struggle for indigenous rights (Harvey 1998, Pleyers 2010). The armed struggle soon ceded to a struggle that was referred to as "discourse guerrilla" (Huffschmid 2004): Zapatista practices and ideas were perceived and admired worldwide, especially by those who were engaged in contesting neoliberal globalization such as the network *People's Global Action* or the Italian *White Overalls*, and turned into the basis of various influential works of theory, including John Holloway's *Changing the World Without Taking Power* (2010) and the Trilogy of *Empire* (2001), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009) by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.

When their attempts at negotiating indigenous autonomy with the Mexican government and transforming the entire Mexican democracy failed, the Zapatistas concentrated both on their international ties and on the construction of their autonomous spaces in Chiapas, without private property and with their own system of production, health and education (Pleyers 2009, 13). The self-administered spaces in Chiapas were also widely seen as laboratories for a different form of living together in ways that were in line both with Marxist goals of equality beyond classes and with indigenous, especially *Tojolabal*, ideals of community, joint deliberation and participation.

As has been pointed out by various scholars, it was precisely their position outside of capitalist development and socialist experiments that allowed the Zapatistas to create "not only a revolutionary moment but also a theoretical and discursive revolution" (Demuro and Holas Allimant 2020, 33; cf. Rabasa 2010, 58). The encounter between *Subcomandante Marcos*, an intellectual from urban Mexico and the Mayan elder *Viejo Antonio*, more than 10 years before the Zapatistas' spectacular appearance in 1994, is widely recognized as one of the key moments of Zapatism. *Viejo Antonio* is also said to be one of the co-authors of the Zapatista declarations, together with other indigenous intellectuals known as Major Mario, Major Moisés, Major Ana María, Tacho, David and Zevedeo. Declarations and narrations widely draw on concepts and stories that were present in the Maya territories in Chiapas long before the formation of the guerrilla movement (García Rojas 2013, 31f.).

Besides the public declarations that were regularly issued by the EZLN between 1994 and 2005, which spread widely also thanks to the newly emerging internet, two *Intergalactic Meetings Against Neoliberalism and for Humanity* played a vital role in the diffusion of Zapatism (Olesen 2004). They were convoked and held in 1996 in Chiapas and in 1997 in Spain. With participants from various continents and different social movements, these gatherings turned into key events for the formation of a joint identity and the emergence of Zapatismo as a central source of inspiration.

Across their communiqués, the Zapatistas play with the question of marginality and centrality in various ways: On the one hand, they insist on their self-identification as "simple and humble people" (EZLN 2005), and in their remote location in the "South-East of Chiapas." However, they are well aware of the global significance that their struggle acquired, notably since the *Intergalactic Meeting against Neoliberalism and for Humanity* held in La Realidad, Chiapas, in 1996. "From the five branches of the star of the world came the step of the men and women whose dignified word was looking for a place to be spoken and heard, the space of encounter"[1] (EZLN 1996c). Thus, from a remote village in South-Eastern Chiapas, La Realidad was turned into the center of a rebellious global movement.

One of the networks that emerged from the *Intergalactic Meetings* was *People's Global Action*, which played a leading role in the dissemination of Zapatista ideas in the more radical strand of the Global Justice Movement (Rucht, Teune and Yang 2007). Another movement organization that took up central ideas and practices of the EZLN was the Italian *Tute Bianche* (White Overalls), which was founded in the mid-nineteen nineties in the context of the *Centri Sociali Autogestiti*, autonomous spaces created in squats (Cecchi 2004). Experiences of both the Zapatistas and the *Tute Bianche*, in turn, became sources of inspiration for Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, whose trilogy of *Empire*, *Multitude* and *Common Wealth* was widely read in the entire Global Justice Movement. With the end of the protest cycle against neoliberal globalization in the course of the two-thousands, worldwide attention on the Zapatistas abated somewhat but never ended entirely and their inspirational importance for protest movements such as *Occupy* was widely acknowledged.

So, on the one hand, Zapatism is clearly a movement and body of thought that originates from the margins of world politics in terms of positionality: Its protagonists come from a place that is on the periphery of capitalist production, geopolitics and knowledge production. Precisely because of that, it is capable of certain experiences and perceptions. As Bell Hooks (2000 [1984], xvi), drawing on her own experience of life as a black woman in a Kentucky town, explains: "We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both." (cf. also Quack et al. 2024). Zapatistas, thus, from their position of marginality had the experience, knowledge, and spirit that turned them into an inspiration for attempts at "changing the world without taking power" (Holloway 2010) across the globe. In that sense, Chiapas temporarily became the antipode of places like New York or Davos where political, economic and cultural power was concentrated and dominant ideas for neoliberal globalization were forged. At the same time, "without taking power" meant that theirs remained a second-hand centrality[2]: Beyond their autonomous spaces, their principles were not institutionalized either on the national or the global level and Zapatistas continued to be victims of institutional violence.

This does not, however, prevent them from engaging in world ordering in the way it is understood here, namely as developing visions of desirable order and working toward

[1] All translations from Spanish are my own.

[2] I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting this expression.

their realization. In fact, even as Zapatistas struggle to uphold their limited spaces in Chiapas, they continue to inspire movements, activists and thinkers. More importantly, as will be discussed in detail below, they point toward ways how their experiences can be shared and their visions can be enacted in various contexts, thereby going beyond the level of utopian thought.

In 2021, 500 years after the fall of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán during the so-called conquest of Mexico, the EZLN let it be known that they did not consider themselves to have been conquered at all and that their battle for independence and autonomy continued (EZLN 2020a). To underline this conviction, and their willingness to both listen and speak to left movements around the world, they announced a mission to the five continents, starting in Europe in the summer of 2021. While they had to overcome a series of obstacles in realizing this plan, not least due to the COVID pandemic, their tour reignited fascination with their ideas and practices around the world. Especially in those areas where they met with members of movement organizations and protest groups around issues like climate change, poverty, racism and gender equality, they could inspire new enthusiasm for their vision of a world in which everyone has a space (EZLN 2020a), thereby echoing their famous vision of a "world in which many worlds fit" (Zimmering 2021).

Zapatista Critique of the Global Status Quo and Visions of Desirable Order

The expression "un mundo en que quepan muchos mundos"—a world in which many worlds fit—is arguably the most famous articulation of the EZLN's vision of a desirable world order. It was first introduced in the *Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Forrest* (EZLN 1996a), then reiterated in the *Second Declaration from La Realidad* (EZLN 1996c) and taken up in the *Fifth Declaration from the Lacandon Forrest* (EZLN 1998). While in the first instance the context suggests a focus on Mexico and the demand for a space of autonomous flourishing for the indigenous communities, the later iterations clearly refer to the world as a whole.

The "world in which many worlds fit" is explicitly pitched against the status quo, which is rendered as "neoliberalism as world system" ("neoliberalismo como sistema mundial" EZLN 1996c). "Neoliberalism" is presented as the global order or "division of the world" ("reparte del mundo," EZLN 1996b) which apparently excludes the "minorities," while it excludes the "majorities" of people in the world, who are denied the fundamental bases of living and condemned to make do with the alms and leftovers handed down by a small, privileged minority. Therefore, neoliberalism is also presented as the antithesis of "humanity." While condemning this "world system" of neoliberalism, the Zapatistas emphasize that the envisioned world "in which many worlds fit" ensures the flourishing of "humanity" as "plural, different, including, and tolerant with itself" (1996c).

Another important aspect of the foundations that ground both the Zapatista critique of the global status quo and their call for a "world of many worlds" lies in their rejection of the "epistemic privilege of a single cosmology and universal subject (i.e., western modernity)" (Holas Allimant and Demuro 2020, 838). One important aspect of the *epistemology* that the Zapatistas develop in their declarations regards the plurality of human experience (cf. Leidhold 2023, 7).

This does not mean that they disregard reason. On the contrary, they emphasize the importance of the "weapons of reason" (EZLN 1994a) in their struggle against oppression and against a seemingly overwhelming "stupidity" (EZLN 1998) which characterizes their opponents. Their answer to the question of how reason can help to discover both the pathologies of the status quo and potential alternatives is two-fold. On the one hand, they deploy the metaphors of revealing and unmasking, which have a long tradition in Western Enlightenment, as well. For example, they emphasize that the Party of Institutionalized Revolution PRI, in fact, masks a reality of dictatorship (EZLN 1994a) and that the power of money which spreads misery and hopelessness is hiding behind the mask of "globalization" (1996b). On the other hand, they emphasize the power of joint deliberation, which they do not trace back to Greek or Enlightenment thought but to the models of Mayan democracy practiced in the Zapatista communities (1996c).

At the same time, they emphasize the importance of ancestral sources of knowledge and wisdom. They express this on many occasions, for example in the Second Declaration from the Lacandon Forrest when they state that "Our faces turned to the mountains we spoke to our ancestors so that their word would show the right way" (1994a). From the "muertos" then comes the call to never give up and keep resisting, in order to honor the tradition of the "hombres de maíz," the men of corn, a reference to the Mayan creation myth *Popol Vuh*. In their declarations and narrations, the EZLN do not treat the *Popol Vuh* as a fixed canonical text, but rather engage in altering and re-narrating it. In this context, the stories attributed to the Mayan elder *Viejo Antonio* assume the role of an alternative gospel (De Vos 2002, cited in García Rojas 2013, 40).

Another source of knowledge and motivation for action to which they accord pivotal importance lies in the emotions and desires present in the communities. Thus, "listening to the indignation" (EZLN 2005) becomes a central way of being in touch with what is wrong with the world. When looking back on more than 10 years since the public emergence of their movement in 1994, they describe their development as a widening of the heart, which can be seen as a poetic expression for empathy:

> Our heart is not the same as before when we started our fight, but it is as if it was bigger since we touched the heart of lots of good people. And we also see that our heart is more offended, more hurt […]. When we touched the others' hearts, we also touched their pain. To put it differently, we saw ourselves in a mirror. (EZLN 2005).

Touching the others' hearts, for the Zapatistas, is both a way of getting to know others' pain and of reflecting on common grievances. Thus, just like their vision of a desirable world order, their notion of how we can get in touch with reality and identify pathologies of the status quo, is plural.

This recognition of a plurality of experiences is also a result of what Walter Mignolo (2002) called the "theoretical revolution" of Zapatism. In his reading, it is based on a "double translation" in which the protagonists of the EZLN engaged. According to Mignolo, they translated between Marxism and concepts of the Maya groups of the Tojolabal and Tzotzil, thereby breaking for the first time the unidirectionality and one-sided will to evangelize, which had dominated the encounter since the arrival of the Spanish. Both traditions of thought, Marxism and indigenous theories, are transformed in the process. Liberation theologian Franz-Josef Hinkelammert even sees this as a call for "diversity as a universal project" (cited in Mignolo 2002, 263). The right to be different, which includes but transcends the call

for autonomy of indigenous territories, is based on the principle of equality.

Pathologies of Appropriating Zapatismo

When exploring world ordering from the margins and with a potential to inspire change, especially in the current situation of multiple global crises, elements of Zapatista visions of a desirable order continue to have a strong appeal and relevance. For example, when the Zapatistas started their international tour with a symbolic navigation to Europe in 2021, they contributed to overcoming the atmosphere of standstill and hopelessness that the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic had created among activists (IWGIA 2021). At the same time, uncritical appropriation or emulation, both by theorists and by movement activists, may lead to certain epistemic, ethical and political problems, which have nurtured a deep skepticism regarding the possibilities of and for global solidarity across differences and positionalities. In the following, I will identify three of them, namely romanticization, hollowing-out and epistemic extractivism/opportunism.

Romanticization

One common pitfall in appropriating Zapatista thought in activism and scholarship regards its romanticization. For example, a romanticization of the reality of Zapatista autonomous spaces can lead to a neglect of the remaining limitations of these exercises, which results from the fact that structural conditions such as the lack of land and the crisis of agriculture also regard the Zapatistas' autonomously administered spaces, and oftentimes lead to lasting conditions of hardship. Furthermore, the creation of circumscribed areas of alternative life may even turn out to be entirely compatible with neoliberal politics and a concentration on such spaces—e.g., in emulation of Zapatism—may entail giving up the critique of institutions and power structures (Pleyers 2009, 20).

With a view to the topic of this Special Forum, this points to certain ambiguities of world ordering from the margins: While experiences of marginality render the conception of alternatives possible, an exclusive focus on the "development of spaces at the margins of the political and institutional sphere" might amount to neglecting the critique of the wider context, or, in Hirschman's terms, to a neglect of the option of "voice" in favor of "exit" (Pleyers 2009, 20; cf. Hirschman 1973). This may also involve taking whatever is part of the "Zapatista experience" as an object of admiration and emulation, without any consideration of problematic aspects such as gerontocratic tendencies and ambiguities with regard to nativism, nationalism and the endorsement of violence (Vanden Berghe 2005, 118), as well women's rights (Johnston and Laxer 2003, 75).

Another aspect of romanticization regards an illusion of "purity" which ignores the entanglement of political practices and thought. Such an illusion is at play when Zapatism is considered in isolation from preceding ideas and its sources of inspiration and stylized as the uncontaminated "other" that can bring salvation. This would be an exercise described by Robbie Shilliam (2021, 2) as an attempt to "search for the most exotic forms of politics around the world and revel in their alienness," which, however, "would keep the 'familiar' familiar and the 'unfamiliar' unfamiliar".

An analogous problematique was identified by Chandra Mohanty (2003, 116) with regard to certain varieties of Western feminism which present "alternative histories either as totally dependent on and determined by a dominant narrative or as isolated and autonomous narratives, untouched in their essence by the dominant figurations." By contrast, Mohanty urges us to see how oppositional agency is entangled and implicated in the dominant development of history.

Similarly, Zapatismo is not the pure product of the ideas and experiences of the Chiapas indigenous communities but is based on a variety of sources and influences, including Marxism and Christian liberation theology: From the 1960s on, Catholic life in the spirit of liberation theology played an essential role for the formation of the indigenous communities in the Lacandon Forrest from which Zapatism would emerge (Leyva Solano 1995). The liberationist conviction that God stands with the oppressed who struggle for their liberation, rooted in novel interpretations of biblical texts like Exodus and the Gospel, contributed to the development of a rebellious spirit among these communities. At the same time, Marxist intellectuals from the cities moved to the countryside and engaged in consciousness-building in the tradition of the Mexican Revolution.

This runs counter to any attempt at stylizing Zapatismo as a pristine or uncontaminated thought but certainly not to finding in it elements that inspire other struggles. In fact, the indigenous communities that were to form the Zapatistas were never only at the receiving end of formational efforts. Rather, they contributed their own forms of knowledge and practice, including the Tzeltal principle a'tel, which implies that those who have been elected as communal leaders must govern by obeying (cf. Harvey 1998, 74).

While one form of romanticization follows from a view of Zapatism and Zapatistas as "completely different," "exotic" and therefore admirable, a contrary form underestimates the real and important material differences that persist between those who struggle on the ground and members of international solidarity networks who have much larger resources at their disposal (Johnston and Laxer 2003, 76).

Hollowing-Out

Hollowing-out is a danger of appropriating Zapatista thought which reduces it to keywords such as "pluralism" and a "world of many worlds," and neglects the context, depth and practices of the underlying ideas. While a shallowness of engagement is prima facie an epistemic problem that limits what can be learned, it also has an important political side: When Zapatism is reduced to vague notions of "pluralism" and resistance to "globalism" this might allow for a strategic appropriation from the right. As is well known, representatives of the New Right have been very active in appropriating concepts and practices of progressive and left-wing thoughts in order to legitimize their world views as part of a strategy they confidently understood as a "Gramscianism of the Right." In the visions of world order suggested by the New Right, the "right to difference" plays an important role as a vehicle by which the focus on ethno-politics, discredited by its association with historical fascism and Nazism, is rehabilitated in a seemingly inoffensive or even progressive way (Drolet and Williams 2022, 33 f.), without, however, leaving behind its racist and biologist reservoir of ideas (Keucheyan 2017, 141).

One relevant example is ethno-pluralism, divulgated by far-right intellectual Alain de Benoist, according to which various "ethno-cultures" should live separated and autonomous lives without external interference. While the proponents of the concept do not explicitly refer to Zapatism, they extensively cite the idea of the "pluriverse" developed by Arturo Escobar and others, which draws on the

Zapatista idea of the "world of many worlds" (Escobar 2018, xvi).

Even if they propose a different genealogy of the term, De Benoist and his fellow ideologues deploy it in a way that is reminiscent of decolonial thought: They associate Western attempts at dominating the world, ranging from the Crusades to imperialism and the imposition of an ideology of development and human rights with its conversion to a homogenizing universalism (De Benoist and Champetier 2021, 18). In this context, the term "indigenous" is usually appropriated to designate a construed native population of Europe, allegedly under threat from elitist projects like mass immigration, thereby tapping into the legitimacy generally accorded to indigenous populations' struggles in the Americas and elsewhere. With such indirect references to emancipatory and indigenous causes, as well as the appropriation of a critique of universalism, "globalism," and imperialism, the protagonists of the New Right inscribe their ideas in a seemingly progressive context.

Apart from what appears like a conceptual convergence, there are also direct references to Zapatism in various strands of far-right thought. For example, the French political association *Égalité & Réconciliation*, founded in 2007 by conspirationist and right-wing extremist Alain Soral, publishes on its website admiring reports on Zapatista protest performances (e.g., Égalité & Réconciliation 2012) and translations of Zapatista comuniqués.

Here, a hollowing-out of certain concepts and narratives such as the "world in which many worlds fit" provides a fertile ground for (mis-)appropriations that seemingly claim to resonate with an emancipatory program, while they deliberately distract from the blatant racism of their visions.

Epistemic Extractivism/Opportunism

Another potential pathology of appropriating Zapatista could be epistemic extractivism. The concept was developed to describe the phenomenon that knowledge and struggles of marginalized groups, especially in the Global South, are appropriated by thinkers and activists in privileged positions who take them out of context and instrumentalize them (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010; Alcoff 2022).

It is based on the concept of material extractivism, i.e., the phenomenon that raw materials like minerals and natural resources are taken without any consideration for social and environmental harm and then processed with the most value-added elsewhere. It is important to note that, differently from raw materials, ideas and concepts are not a scarce resource. However, there are certain problems that can be read in parallel.

According to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, who belongs to the Canadian First Nation of Mississauga Nishnaabeg, a rush on "traditional knowledge" started in the wake of the 1987 Brundtland report, which encouraged considering indigenous knowledge. In her analysis, this turn was based on the motto, "Let's take whatever teachings you might have that would help us right out of your context, right away from your knowledge holders, right out of your language, and integrate them into this assimilatory mindset" (cited in Klein 2013). In this process, the authors of the respective sets of knowledge are left aside or without due credit and world-order concepts that are radically different are de-politicized and de-radicalized.

With a view to the Zapatistas, one of whose mottos is "Para todos todo" ("Everything for Everyone"), we would not expect them to be particularly weary about mingling thoughts or taking them out of one context to put them in another one. So while epistemic extractivism may be less relevant in the context of Zapatismo, a related phenomenon could be called *epistemic opportunism*: The turn to Zapatism may be motivated by reasons that lie outside the actual concern with its ideas and practices. One of them concerns the trends in academia, including a turn to non-Western sources as an asset in a competitive market of ideas and publications. While individual scholars aim to diversify their research portfolio, universities and departments have started to regard a more diverse curriculum and staff as part of superficial "decolonizing" and ultimately as a "performance indicator" (Shain et al. 2021, 928) in a competition over student recruitment. Diversity, then, is defined and deployed in ways that reproduce rather than challenge social privilege (Ahmed 2007, 240).

Opportunism is also at the heart of the charge that Rivera Cusicanqui levels against well-established scholars from the Global South in prestigious Northern universities, including Walter Mignolo. According to her, they appropriate and use indigenous intellectuals' ideas without crediting and citing them properly, thereby excluding them from the circulation of symbolic and material capital (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010, 58).

Reflecting on the dangers of epistemic opportunism also pushes me to reflect on my own positionality in engaging with Zapatismo. As a white female academic based in the Global North with a full-time but temporary employment, my engagement with Zapatism might well run the risk of epistemic opportunism: Since engagement with "Southern" epistemologies and a wide understanding of the canon have been turned into boxes to be checked on a competitive academic job market, writing a paper on Zapatista world ordering might serve purposes that lie beyond interest in Zapatista ideas and narratives. Furthermore, while I have followed the development of Zapatism for about 20 years and also engaged with the global movement against neoliberal globalization which took inspiration from Zapatism, I have never visited Chiapas. While I do not think that having traveled to Zapatista areas (which presupposes a considerable amount of resources) is a necessary legitimation for writing about Zapatism, a reflection on how to prevent mere extractivism and opportunism is necessary. For me, a potential way to do justice to the legacy of Zapatism is to turn toward ways of discussing, engaging and teaching which come closer to the practices that the Zapatistas themselves propose as pathways toward the "world of many worlds."

Pathways to a World of Many Worlds

As mentioned before, an important characteristic of Zapatista ways of world ordering is that they not only articulate critique of the status quo and alternative visions but also explore the pathways that render the realization of these visions possible both in the future and in the here-and-now. I suggest that these pathways are not only highly relevant in overcoming abstract utopias but also as a starting point for thinking of ways in which activists and scholars can learn from and with Zapatism, and craft a common ground for thinking about world ordering. They certainly do not amount to a silver bullet or a solution that magically resolves the pathologies and pitfalls of appropriation. However, they might provide some guidance in attempts at trying to avoid them and potentially serve as antidotes. In particular, three ways of imagining and treading such paths can be distinguished, namely creating, narrating and walking.

Crear (Creating)

Zapatistas firmly believe in the human capacity for creative action: They ground this belief on their "experience and the long and luminous history of indigenous struggle which we inherited from our predecessors" (EZLN 1998), as well as the power of "dreams" (EZLN 1996c).

In reflecting on the gathering in La Realidad in 1996, they combine the notion of dreaming, and even folly, which are both an individual capacity of the mind and a collective practice directed toward the future, with metaphors from Mayan genesis narrations associated with growing and caring:

> The folly of a convocation to the five continents […] found out that it wasn't alone in its delirium, and, soon, the follies of the whole planet started to work to let the dream rest in the soil of reality, to wash it in mud, to grow it under the rain, to speak it with the other, to draw it and give it form and body. (EZLN 1996c)

More even, the gathering in La Realidad stands for a prefigurative form of politics, which already realized the envisioned future in the here-and-now: The "world made of many worlds [. . .] opened itself a space and conquered its right to be possible" (EZLN 1996c). Importantly, a performative and prefigurative meaning is not only given to the intergalactic meeting in La Realidad, but also to their autonomous spaces in Chiapas, which provide spaces of experience and alternative organization of politics, education and community life (Pleyers 2009, 19).

The confidence that they are actually capable of creating a new world is also expressed explicitly in the First Declaration from La Realidad: "It is not necessary to conquer the world. It is enough to make it anew. For us. Today" (EZLN 1996b). By opposing *conquest* to *re-creation* they also allude to the alleged "conquest" of the New World by Spain and Europe and set their own project apart from a colonial logic.

This opposition is also taken up in the opening paragraph of the Fifth Declaration from the Lacandon Forrest, where they juxtapose "the house of pain and misery" with the "house of light and happiness," which is "the land of life and hope" (EZLN 1998). In this context, they reiterate their faith in human—and especially their own—capacity to create: "This is how we gave birth to it, how we fought for it and how we will grow it" (EZLN 1998).

Besides the concrete realization of alternative visions and their reflection, the Zapatistas also narrate the power of creating the world anew in their stories, especially the alternative genesis narrations told by *El Viejo Antonio*. This character, based on the Mayan elder whom Subcomandante Marcos met in the Lacandon Forrest long before the uprising, embodies Mayan wisdom, but also a creative confidence in altering the traditional tales. His versions of the stories on the origins of humans, animals and the universe "figuratively create the world anew, and, in doing so, must find new forms of expression for the world that is born in their pages" (Holas Allimant and Demuro 2020, 836).

Contar (Narrating)

The creation of alternative genesis stories points to another decisive component in the Zapatistas' practices of world ordering, namely their narrations, both with a view to implicit narratives, i.e., the models of sense-making and temporality that they deploy and with a view to explicit narratives, i.e., stories that are told by someone to someone else in textual form (Meretoja 2021: 37), especially in the stories revolving around *El Viejo Antonio*.

Part of the underlying implicit narrative is a notion of temporality that involves an element of progressivism. This becomes obvious when the Zapatistas reproach their adversaries with trying to block the course of history. In the Second Declaration from the Lacandon Forrest, they state:

> Only these political fossils are planning to invert the course of the history of Mexico and delete from national history the cry that the whole country made theirs since the first of January of 94: ¡YA BASTA! [enough is enough]. (EZLN 1994a)

The reference to the "cry" ("el grito") is an emphasis on the urgency of their cause and a historical allusion to another famous cry, namely the "grito de dolores" with which Miguel Hidalgo triggered the war of independence from Spanish rule in the early nineteenth century. Thus, the Zapatistas inscribe their fight for autonomy and against neoliberalism into a history that is both national and indigenous. Accordingly, in the same declaration they state: "In us, the history of the dignified struggle of our ancestors is taking place once again" (EZLN 1994a).

In the sequence of historical liberation struggles within which the EZLN locate their own role, the Mexican revolution of 1910 plays a particular role. This can already be discerned from their name, which refers to its most popular hero Emiliano Zapata. Accordingly, the "Fourth Declaration from the Lacandon Forrest" starts with a long quote from Zapata, followed by an explanation of what the contextualization means for their struggle:

> The flower of the word will not die. The hidden face of those who name it today may die but the word came from the depth of history and of the soil and it can no longer be pulled out by the arrogance of power. We were born in the night and in the night we live. We will die in it. But tomorrow there will be light for the others, for all those who are crying in the night today, for those who are denied the day, for those for whom death is a gift, for those for whom life is forbidden. Light for everyone. Everything for everyone. (EZLN 1996a)

Thus, the rootedness in the revolutionary and indigenous history makes their struggle meaningful, even if they face death and temporary defeat. The metaphor of darkness and light, which is well known from socialist and other Western forms of philosophy of history, is reinterpreted to illustrate the directionality of an indigenous struggle that might seem hopeless but is not.

In spite of the reference to indigenous struggles and the heroism of their ancestors, both the declarations and the stories published by Subcomandante Marcos question temporal linearity. In the *Relatos de el Viejo Antonio*, the indigenous protagonist deliberately subverts linear ideas of temporality with statements like "Where tomorrow and yesterday unite, things will end" or "What we were telling you about happened many years ago, that is, today" (Subcomandante Marcos 1998, 101, 114, cited in Vanden Berghe 2005, 110).

As already alluded to, the stories around *el Viejo Antonio* do much more than subvert the linear sequence of time: As fictional products of imagination they stand for a bold claim to "reframe, rethink, and recreate the world" (Holas Allimant and Demuro 2020, 832). One way in which the stories do that is by narrating the cultural and political hybridity and plurality that characterizes the Zapatista vision of a desirable world order: Strategies to achieve this include

the mixing of genres and traditions, the intertextual combination of mythological, political and humorous elements within the stories, and a use of the Spanish language that reflects Mayan influences and constructions (Holas Allimant and Demuro 2020, 840; Demuro and Holas Allimant 2020, 27).

Besides the formal elements, the contents of the stories also point to the encounter between the Mayan and the mestizo world, and the protagonism of the Mayan elder, i.e., the centrality of the marginalized. Most stories feature a framework narration about an encounter of *El Viejo Antonio* and *Marcos*, the alter ego of the author, who is otherwise known as "Subcomandante Marcos." In these framework stories, both protagonists engage in a conversation, which stands for a process of mutual engagement between indigenous knowledge and the wider society as it can emerge from a space at the margins of both worlds. At the same time, the indigenous voice, that of *Viejo Antonio*, is privileged and associated with the role of the teacher, thereby reversing patterns of colonial "transfer of knowledge" (Demuro and Holas Allimant 2020, 36).

The contents of his lessons often revolve around the main tenets of Zapatista visions of a desirable order, including democracy, liberty and justice, which, according to the "Story of Words" (Subcomandante Marcos 1998, 65) were the first words in all languages of the world. In the course of the narration, the protagonists define and ground each of the principles: "Justice" stands for giving everyone what they deserve based on their way of living, "liberty" for the possibility for everyone to choose their path, and "democracy" for a way for everyone's thoughts to come to a good agreement while obliging those who rule to obey those who are ruled (Subcomandante Marcos 1998, 65 f., cf. Demuro and Holas Allimant 2020, 29).

In the context of this story, two images keep returning: that of the mirror ("espejo") as the instrument through which the Gods created all words and that of the path or walk ("camino"). Before they died, the Gods handed over the responsibility of keeping the meaning of the first words to the first humans. By learning about the story, Marcos and the young Antonio, his comrade in learning, become part of those trusted with this task. As the narrator emphasizes, in order not to be forgotten, the words have to be "walked, fought, and lived" (Subcomandante Marcos 1998, 67).

Thus, the stories of *Viejo Antonio* invite "readers to rethink and recreate the world alongside the Zapatistas" and to "approach the Zapatistas in solidarity" (Holas Allimant and Demuro 2020, 840). The importance of tapping into counter-narratives instead of ahistorical universalisms in forging transnational solidarity is also emphasized by Chandra Mohanty (2003, 119) in the context of her discussion of the chances for transnational feminism.

An example of a Zapatista counter-narrative that suggests hybrid identities and precludes ethnocentric appropriations is the story in which *Viejo Antonio* re-tells the Mayan creation myth *Popol Vuh*: Both in his version and in the traditional one, the creation of men takes place as a sequence of different types, made out of various materials, before the "true men" were created, the men of corn. Importantly, the men of corn do not have a fixed ethnic identity. In responding to the narrator's question concerning their skin color, *Viejo Antonio* responds that "they were of all skins and no one really knew, because the people of corn, the true men and women, didn't have a face" (Subcomandante Marcos 1998, 22).

Thus, while there remain some tensions and ambiguities, and there are passages where a superior morality is attributed to the indigenous communities based on tradition and skin color (Vanden Berghe 2005, 118), the overall message is one of equality and transcendence of ethnic stereotypes. Along these lines, engaging with the stories may be a way of appreciating that Zapatism was born through a process of "critical and emancipatory 'mestizaje' [mixture]" (Vázquez Montalbán 1999, cf. also Vanden Berghe 2005, 107), thereby avoiding the pitfalls of romanticization and ethnocentric appropriation.

The expression of "not having a face" has also been associated with the Zapatistas' signature ski masks (pasamontañas). These masks can be understood not just as a protection against the cold of the Chiapas mountains or the threat of repression, but as a symbol of a non-fixed identity. In that sense, they have turned the Zapatistas into a prominent example of a post-identitarian movement, which would later be emulated by other social movement activists, including the protagonists of *Euro Mayday*, who refused to identify with either nationalities or specific roles such as the "worker." They created commonalities not by excluding others but by asking questions, inspired by the Zapatista slogan of "walking while asking questions" (cf. Marchart 2012).

Caminar (Walking)

In the "Story of questions" (Subcomandante Marcos 1998, 55–61), the "real humans" famously learn to "ask in order to walk." The motto of "caminar preguntando"—to walk by asking questions—can be seen as a basic disposition to question what is seemingly known, without, however, taking this habit of questioning as a reason to stand still.

At the same time, walking is used in Zapatista declarations and narratives as a metaphor for the arduous but hopeful way that leads from a state of deprivation and marginalization toward liberation, sometimes referred to with recourse to the Biblical tradition of Exodus from Egypt toward the promised land (cf. Vanden Berghe 2005, 117; García Rojas 2013, 37). These allusions are not surprising as the indigenous communities that would later form the EZLN took shape after a migration toward the Cañadas of the Lacandon forest, a process which was accompanied by a group of committed catholic priests and catechists (cf. Leyva Solano 1995). However, as already mentioned and as the Zapatistas emphasize with another recourse to the metaphor of walking, they did not need missionaries or interpreters to make their claims heard, move in a self-chosen way and impact their world: "Our voice started to walk centuries ago and it will never fade" (EZLN 1994b).

In the Second Declaration from La Realidad, the Zapatistas also use the metaphor of walking to refer to the paths that brought activists from all continents and walks of life together for the *Intergalactic Gathering*, thereby also referring to the movement that was necessary for them to reach Chiapas:

> The rebellious look for each other. They walk towards each other. They find each other, and, together, they break more circles. In the countryside and in the city, in the provinces, nations, continents, the rebellious start to recognize each other, to know each other as equal and different. They continue their arduous walk, they walk how walking has to be today, that is, struggling. (EZLN 1996c)

Beyond these figurative meanings of "caminar," the Zapatistas also suggest and practice walking together in the literal sense as a way of being in touch with others and joining them in their efforts. For example, in 2001, they organized a joint walk toward Mexico City together with Mexicans

and internationals who supported their demands. While this practice certainly also belongs to a long and global tradition of "walking as an expression and formation of collective/popular power" (Youatt 2022, 9), it exceeds it and contributes to a mutual understanding of those who walk together.

Walking as a physical practice and walking as a form of mutual understanding are also interwoven in one of the most famous tales by Viejo Antonio: In a re-narration of the history of Emiliano Zapata, Viejo Antonio fuses the history of the national hero Zapata with the story of two Maya deities, Ik'al and Votán, who represent night and day respectively. According to the story, the two gods were sad because they couldn't move until they learned to "walk together, but separately agreeing [juntos, pero separados de acuerdo]" (Subcomandante Marcos 1998, 58, cited in Vanden Berghe 2005, 146). Walking together, they became Zapata. Thus, the joint walk of the two deities symbolizes the encounter between the indigenous and the urban intellectuals, as well as between the armed Zapatista forces based in the mountains and the constituencies located in the Lacandon plains (cf. García Rojas 2013, 42; De Vos 2002, 374).

In other stories, the "camino" (walk) stands for the Zapatistas as a whole. According to the narrator, Viejo Antonio expresses this with the words "This path that we are is a happy one [Está alegre este camino que somos]" (Subcomandante Marcos 1998, 100, cited in Vanden Berghe 2005, 159).

In the "Sixth Declaration from the Lacandon Forrest," they also put special emphasis on walking as mutual understanding: The aim of the declaration is to "say what was our path and where we are now, to explain how we see the world and our country, to say what we think of doing and how we think we will do it, to invite other persons to walk with us [. . .]" (EZLN 2005).

Based on these and other lines of Zapatista thought, geographer Juanita Sundberg (2014, 39) expresses an invitation to her readers—in her case mostly geographers whose majority are still white—to "walk, ask, listen and converse" following the example of the EZLN. As she recalls with reference to David Turnbull (2007, 142), trail walking is "intertwined with storytelling, narratives that call forth and enact connections between people, place, and practices in time and space" (Sundberg 2014, 39). Thus, walking and "walking-with" can be understood as a form of world-making that "may help to foster recognition of the multiplicity of knowledge systems" (Sundberg 2014, 39).

An example from the history of Zapatism is the 2001 walk to Mexico City, which rendered the meeting with the Italian movement of the *Tute Bianche* possible: When members of the *Tute Bianche* accompanied two hundred Zapatista comandantes on their march, they consolidated their departure from orthodox Marxism with its conviction of the necessity of workers as the revolutionary subject. Instead, inspired by Zapatista thought, they turned their focus to the coalitions of the "marginalized" and precarious (Ya Basta 2001, 140, cited in Becucci 2003, 7).

More recently, performance scholar Diane Taylor narrated a visit of international scholars to the Zapatista territories as revolving around a practice of walking: "Walking, spatially situating ourselves in relation to and with others, speaking and participating with them, moving through (rather than distancing themselves from) the space and events, might allow for a grounded theory" (Taylor 2015). Her take is inspired by an Aymara saying reported by Andean scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui according to which "to be me, I have to walk and speak with others" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2014 cited in Taylor 2015).

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have engaged Zapatista critiques of the status quo and visions of a desirable order. In a second step, I turned to potential pathologies of appropriating Zapatism from outside Chiapas, both for movement activists and scholars, namely romanticization, hollowing-out, and epistemic extractivism/opportunism. I then explored how far Zapatista notions of *creating, narrating and walking* could serve as a starting point to overcome such impasses and engage in something that might ultimately develop into world ordering from-and-with the margins. Creating, narrating and walking cannot magically resolve all the potential problems of engaging with Zapatism or make the pitfalls of romanticization, hollowing-out and extractivism/opportunism disappear. However, they may be an inspiration for altering and widening the modes and scope of academic and activist practices.

I suggest that engaging with Zapatism (and other examples of world ordering from the margins) remains fruitful and important not only to widen the canon of (International) Political Theory but also to look for alternative visions of world order in times of multiple crises. According to the reading suggested here, the overall direction that emerges from Zapatista thought and practice is that of shifting the focus from the critique of the status quo and the visions of a desirable order toward the suggested pathways for approaching that desirable order. These pathways, including creating, narrating and walking, might be incorporated into both activist and academic practices in various ways, potentially also bridging the gap between the two as we try to "imagine our way forward" (Mitzen 2023, 1). Of course, this is not to say that more established academic forms of engagement like close reading, economic analysis or critique of ideology should be abandoned. Rather, creating, narrating and walking could be implemented as complementary forms of engagement in search of a common ground between activists and academics, and between thinkers from the margin(s) and the center(s).

There are various recent examples which show that the power of walking together is already being tested inside and outside academia. One is the initiative "Shared Walks," which started in 2018 as a project by Eylem Ertürk and Bernd Rohrauer at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. Taking as their starting point the question "How can we walk with others?," the two researchers created what they called "Walking Research Laboratories," which brought together participants with different perspectives on questions of living in the city (Ertürk and Rohrauer n.d.). Building on an iterative and participatory process, the project was developed over the years and now includes a "climate change edition," which explores how walking with others can mitigate the debilitating effects of the loss experienced due to climate change (Mert 2021).

While the example does not explicitly refer to Zapatism, it underlines the Zapatistas' concept and practice of walking together as a physical practice that can foster empowerment, understanding and solidarity across differences and power asymmetries. Along these lines, we could conclude that while upholding the Zapatista ideal of a "world of many worlds," the more immediate aim for both academics and activists in times of multiple crises is that of contributing to

a world of many *walks* in which people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and struggles can come together.

This also resonates with considerations by Chandra Mohanty on the possibility of unity in feminist struggles: For her (2003, 116), "the real challenge arises in being able to craft a notion of political unity without relying on the logic of appropriation and incorporation." Without any guarantee of success, the pathways envisioned by the Zapatistas as ways toward their desired form of world order, including creating, narrating and walking, can also serve as pathways toward such a unity that avoids appropriation and incorporation. While exercises of creation in the form of prefigurative politics potentially provide a space for anticipating experiences of a desirable order, listening and contributing to stories and counter-narratives contributes to making sense of such experiences. In teaching, recourse to narratives and folk tales might help to convey concepts without creating the "confidence and clubbiness" (Mitzen 2023, 4) of specialized knowledge. Walking with, in turn, might be a way of sharing and communicating experiences in an embodied and intuitive form, which can complement verbal articulations.

In 2023, the news coming from Chiapas mainly revolve around massive armed attacks against Zapatista communities committed by paramilitary groups of landowners and members of drug cartels, without interventions from local or federal authorities (Santos Cid 2023). The alarming reports do not attract a lot of attention outside certain movement organizations and solidarity circles. This shows that the Zapatistas are constantly straddling between global ambitions and a struggle for survival. However, their fundamental critique of the dominant world order and their bold forms of world ordering from the margins continue to inspire activists and scholars.

Thus, in 2021, when they started their tour around the world in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic with a symbolic navigation to Europe, they showed their continued commitment not only to create enclaves of alternative order but also to question the very structure of (multiple) margins and centers. Here, too, the notion and practice of walking is associated with the search for a common ground across differences. Accordingly, their focus was not just on divisions but on a joint human dream of freedom, which is reflected in a joint "path":

> Thus, various Zapatista delegations, men, women, and others, the color of our earth, will go out into the world, walking or setting sail to remote lands, oceans, and skies, not to seek out difference, superiority, or offense, much less pity or apology, but to find what makes us equal. It is not just our humanity that unites our different skin, our different ways of life, our different languages and colors. It is also, and above all, the common dream we have shared as a species as of the moment, in a seemingly distant Africa, from the lap of the very first woman, when we set out on the search for freedom that guided our first steps and which continues its path today. (EZLN 2020b)

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