

The Zapatistas through Postcolonial Eyes

What is the Significance of a Postcolonial Approach to the EZLN?



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Abstract Since the uprising of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico, on January 1, 1994 the movement has proven significant in multiple ways. This article investigates the significance a postcolonial perspective provides for the Zapatista movement. It is argued that the oppressive structures, originating from the colonial period, continue to marginalize former colonized subjects such as the Maya population. It is these oppressive systems which the Zapatistas' struggle against through the production of an alternative knowledge system. The theories of the postcolonial thinkers Frantz Fanon, Gayatri C. Spivak and Walter D. Mignolo serve as the theoretical framework in order to underpin this theory.

Keywords EZLN, postcolonial theory, Frantz Fanon, Gayatri C. Spivak, Walter Mignolo, theory of racialization, logic of coloniality, subalternity

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1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Latin America is still shaped by the Spanish conquest in the 16th century and the subsequent period of colonization. As the sociologist Aníbal Quijano points out in his work *Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America*, there are two important elements introduced by the conquistadores which are still present in the region of the Americas: The first element is that all forms of labour, production and exploitation were centred around the axis of capital which generated a new pattern of economic relations, which is world capitalism. The second element is that the Spanish and Portuguese settlers brought the idea of race to the new land. It divided the world into superior and inferior races, the colonizers belonging to the first and the colonized indigenous and black population to the latter category (2000:216). At present, the capitalist system and racial differentiations are interwoven remains of colonialism, since economic opportunities are mostly controlled by the offspring of the conquistadores, often leaving the indigenous population in disadvantaged positions. Furthermore, political opportunities are mainly in the hands of the *mestizo* society, which creates even greater deprivation and marginalization for the indigenous population (Blauner 1972).

¡*Ya basta!* [Enough is enough!], the world famous exclamation of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), was a response to these circumstances which the indigenous Mayan population in southern Mexico had to face. It was first proclaimed in the year 1993, in the *Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* (EZLN 1994:51) and was addressed to the people of Mexico, especially to the rural impoverished Maya living in Chiapas. This declaration intended to create awareness among the indigenous peasants about the unequal treatment and economic, cultural and political exploitation they had suffered for the past 500 years and to motivate them for joined insurgency against the Mexican state. The most recent expression of this exploitation was demonstrated by the introduction of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, Canada and the United States on January 1, 1994. The NAFTA initiated a process of neoliberal restructuring which aimed at the redistribution of land, disadvantaging indigenous and mestizo peasants in Chiapas. On the same day, the EZLN flashed into action, taking over seven municipalities in Chiapas and declaring war on the Mexican government. Full scale fighting between the EZLN and the Mexican army and its allied paramilitary organizations lasted only for a few weeks as the Mexican authorities changed the strategy to ‘low-intensity conflict.’ A little while later, both parties agreed to negotiate without any real results (Egan 2006a:67).

Ever since these events took place, thousands of words have been written about the EZLN which often emphasized the post-modern character of the social movement and their opposition to economic liberalism and globalization. Yet little of this work has addressed the Zapatistas' opposition to imperialistic structures of Western thought and the perpetuated domination and exploitation of the Maya population. I argue that the EZLN can be considered as a demonstration of the fact that Western thought still dominates in the world, as postcolonial thinkers like Gayatri Spivak (1988) and Walter Mignoli (2005) suggest. To be more specific, this paper is an attempt to explore the Zapatista movement from the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory in order to understand its significance in developing an alternative view of the world.

2. METHODOLOGY

Before I start with the analysis of the EZLN from a postcolonial perspective, the methodological framework of postcolonial theory needs to be illustrated. It is probably best to begin with Frantz Fanon, a Martinique-born French psychiatrist. He is considered to be the most crucial forerunner of postcolonial theory. His greatest contributions to this field are the passionately written works – *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) – which deal with the mechanisms of colonialism and their effects on those it oppresses. Due to his own experiences with colonization and its effects, he gained the moral authority to record the psychological damages often suffered by colonized people (McLeod 2010:22). The theory of postcolonialism as a recognized academic field came into being during the late 1970's with Edward Said publishing his influential book *Orientalism* (1978). In this work the author examined, while drawing upon developments in Marxist and poststructuralist theories, how the knowledge that Western imperial powers formed about their colonies helped to continually justify their subjugation. During the 1980's a new generation of postcolonial thinkers, inspired by the work of Fanon and Said, applied their ideas to the reading and representation of once-colonized cultures, concluding that the signing of declarations of independence does not automatically imply freedom of colonialism. Rather, there must be a mental change, a disputing with the dominant Western ways of thinking and an alternative means of expression in order to create space for the subaltern or marginalized groups to speak (Mc Leod 2010:24-25).

Since the Maya population in Chiapas can be characterized as a subaltern, or marginalized group, it makes sense to investigate to what extent the EZLN creates space for

them to express themselves through the production of an alternative discourse. As such, the theoretical foundation of various postcolonial thinkers will be applied on the ideology of the Zapatista movement, beginning with Fanon's social theory. Then, this thesis attempts to answer the question of Gayatri C. Spivak's very influential essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988), which is a critique of Western models of class-consciousness and subjectivity, based on the experiences of the Zapatistas. Subsequently, the term *Logic of Coloniality* will be addressed in the light of Walter Mignolo's work *The Idea of Latin America* (2005). The EZLN ideology, known as *Zapatismo*, will be demonstrated as an example of an alternative discourse. The thesis will end with concluding remarks and suggestions for further research.

3. FRANTZ FANON – Racialized Nature of Imperialism

As already mentioned above, Fanon can be seen as one of the most crucial pioneers in postcolonial theory. He is often considered to be a synonym for anti-colonialism and 'Negro' resistance. On that note, the application of Fanon's theory to the EZLN movement might seem odd in the first instance, since their uprising in 1994 took place long after Mexican independence of Spain in 1810 and because the Mayan population is obviously not of African descent. However, I hope to make clear in what way Fanon's theory is of particular relevance to the Zapatistas in order to understand the significance of the movement.

One of Fanon's most relevant accomplishments centres on his *theory of racialization*. In this he examines the idea of race introduced by the colonizers, extending Marx's concept of alienation to the analysis of how race is constructed and reproduced within colonialism (Egan 2006b). He uses psychoanalysis in order to underpin his assumption that the colonized subject is likely to suffer from an inferiority complex due to the colonial oppressive structures. Fanon argues that if there is an inferiority complex, then it is the outcome of a double process: primarily, it is economic in nature; subsequently, the internalization or the "epidermalization" of this inferiority takes place (Fanon 1967:4). Starting with the first part of this double process, Fanon thus argues that economic deprivation creates a feeling of inferiority. Moreover, he sees in the realm of economics the reason for a racial categorization of people in the first place. Speaking in more concrete terms, racism and its objectifications of the colonized can only be encompassed through its conjunction with capitalism. Accordingly, as Egan states, the relationship between the colonial core and the colonial periphery is, like that between capitalist and proletariat, based on exploitation (2006b):

The wealth of the imperial countries is our wealth too.... For in a very concrete way Europe has stuffed herself inordinately with the gold and raw materials of the colonial countries: Latin America, China, and Africa. From all these, under whose eyes Europe today raises up her tower of opulence, there has flowed out for centuries toward that same Europe diamonds and oil, silk and cotton, wood and exotic products. Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The wealth which smothers her is that which was stolen from the underdeveloped peoples. (Fanon 1968: 102)

Thus, colonialism represents the core, benefitting from the systematic underdevelopment of the periphery. This process of underdevelopment has an ideological component which is racism. One might even argue that the idea of race serves merely as an obscuration of a brutal economic reality (Egan 2006b). Fanon argues that race and class gain meaning from one another:

The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem. (1968:40)

Race and its articulation with capitalism, the central problem in Fanon's theory, are also at the centre of the Zapatista analysis of exploitation and underdevelopment in Chiapas. In an essay written in 1992, the spokesman of the Zapatistas, Subcomandante Marco, wrote:

Chiapas's experience of exploitation goes back for centuries. [...] Like the banana republics, but at the peak of neoliberalism and "libertarian revolutions," the Southeast continues to export raw materials, just as it did 500 years ago. It continues to import capitalism's principal product: death and misery. (Shadows of Tender Fury 1995:23)

The EZLN thus directly opposes capitalism while making a direct connection to exploitation, death and misery in a part of Mexico, where a high percentage of indigenous people live. Besides, the Subcomandante is comparing Chiapas to a banana republic meaning a politically unstable country that economically depends upon the exports of a limited resource and usually features a classed society – a large impoverished working class and a ruling plutocracy. According to the EZLN, capitalism is only a way in which the imperialist west can legitimize the economic exploitation of their land:

Chiapas loses blood through many veins: through oil, gas ducts, electric lines, railways [...]and forest trails. This land continues to pay tribute to the imperialists: petroleum, electricity, cattle, money, coffee [...]. These raw materials [...] flow to [...]different parts of the world: The United States, Canada, Holland, Germany, Italy, Japan, but with the same fate: to feed imperialism. (Shadows of Tender Fury 1995:20)

This can be seen as a demonstration for the applicability of Fanon's theory to understand the Zapatistas. Although Fanon mainly criticizes the colonial powers and their oppressive structures that legitimize white supremacy and economic exploitation, the EZLN sees capitalism as a means of imperialism in order to continue with the exploitation.

According to Fanon, another reason for racialization during colonialism lies in the human need to define oneself through what one is not or through the other. In the context of colonialism, the superior perception of self of the colonizer can only exist through his relationship with the dark colonized, who are seen as inferior and vice versa. Fanon states: "For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man...his inferiority comes into being through the other." (1967:83). The introduction of the system of racial signification in the colonial world became a system of power legitimizing white supremacy. This was accomplished, among other things, through cultural domination of the colonists who repressed indigenous culture and replaced it with their own. At this juncture, language is of particular interest to Fanon. According to him, the adoption of the language of the colonizers means to betray one's own self and culture, and to internalize one's own inferiority:

To speak is to exist absolutely for the other [...] to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture [...]. (1967:8)

The internalization of inferiority, the other part of the double process mentioned above, has entailed the fatal consequence that race, although culturally constructed, became naturalized (Kane 2007:385). At this point, a connection to the Zapatista movement can be made which, although taking a patriotic line in their struggle by including all dispossessed Mexicans, clearly has an indigenous identity, defending the rights of the Mayan population (Wade 1997:98). During the colonial period, this indigenous group has experienced similar treatment as the African population, on which Fanon has based his insights. In a similar vein they had become victim to the cultural imposition of the colonizer's values and beliefs, and were forced to learn Spanish, which still is the national language of Mexico. The EZLN emphasises that even in contemporary Latin America the indigenous population continues to suffer from racial stigmatization. This can be seen in the document about their conditions for dialogue with the government: "Social demands. All of these refer to what we endure as Indigenous people of Chiapas: racism, marginalization, lack of respect, expulsions, attacks on our culture and traditions, etc." (*Shadows of Tender Fury* 1995:105). This articulation is already sufficient to demonstrate the ongoing social and cultural inequalities the Mayan population in

Chiapas has faced for five centuries, since the "Meeting of Two Worlds" occurred (EZLN 1994:42). Thomas Benjamin even states that they have long been considered as the "people without history", who were merely the object of someone else's history (2000:450). This also contributes to an ongoing internalization of an inferiority complex, since they lack a useful past to base their identity on. All these circumstances contribute to the fact that dignity for the indigenous people is a central request within the Zapatista movement in order to restore this lost identity and have pride in it (EZLN 1994).

Returning to Fanon's theory, decolonization represents a breaking free from alienation, the creation of the new self and a new society free of the colonizers. In that sense, the self-emancipation is a dramatic break with this internalized inferiority (Egan 2006a:78). Fanon describes this transformative process as follows:

Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But the creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the 'thing' which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself. (Fanon 1968:36-37)

This process of freeing oneself from oppressive structures is very well translatable for the Zapatista movement. Although the independence movement from the Spanish crown happened slightly more than two centuries ago, the power structures which prevailed during the colonial system are still basically the same. Only now they are concealed through capitalism and the absence of the colonizers. As mentioned earlier, the EZLN is convinced about the fact that the imperial character of the Western states still leads to exploitation of the indigenous people. At this juncture, the comparison to colonialism is very reasonable, since colonialism is only "one form of practice, one modality of control" which results from the ideology of imperialism (McLeod 2010:9). Hence, the revolution of the EZLN symbolizes a creation of awareness among the Mayans to have the same rights and the same value as well as every other human being living in this world.

Even after centuries of independence, the majority of the Mayan population does not experience equal treatment, neither economically or politically, nor socially. Moreover, the indigenous people remain economically marginalized and exploited by capitalist structures of trade which was demonstrated by the comparative analysis of Fanon's social theory and the consciousness of the Zapatista movement. Fanon as well as the Zapatistas are very active in supporting oppressed groups in order to overcome their inferiority complex and install pride in their identity as African and indigenous people respectively. Therefore, the uprising could mean breaking free from exactly these oppressive structures that created such an inferiority

complex in the first place. But are they really heard, do they have a voice? These questions bring us to the next chapter, centred on ideas of Spivak, concerning the overall question: Can the Maya speak in contemporary Mexico through the EZLN?

4. GAYATRI C. SPIVAK – Can the Maya speak?

The Indian literary critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is best known for challenging the legacy of colonialism regarding the way we read and think about literature and culture by the political use of contemporary critical and cultural theories. Marxism, deconstruction, feminism and postcolonial theory are included in the range of her theoretical interests. Along with other leading intellectuals as Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, Spivak has questioned the disciplinary principles of academic philosophy and literary criticism by focusing on the cultural texts of those people who are often marginalized by dominant western culture, such as the working class, the new immigrants, the postcolonial subjecta and women. As an advocate for the texts and voices of such minority groups, Spivak also criticized dominant Western ideas of the contemporary era, including the notion that the Western world is more civilized, developed and democratic than the non-Western world (Morton 2003:1).

In this chapter the focus will lie on Spivak's famous essay 'Can the subaltern speak?' and what it reveals about the EZLN movement and their claim to represent the Mayan population. In her essay, Spivak addresses the issue of subaltern representation in a diverse array of epistemic fields, especially criticizing the knowledge-production project. Her critique is based in the first place on the French philosophers Foucault and Deleuze and their conversation about intellectuals and power (Spivak 1988:66). According to Spivak, both intellectuals make the mistake, when speaking about representing the subaltern through their writings, to ignore the fact that there are two different meanings of the term 'representation'. According to her, representation can be translated as 'speaking for', as in politics, but it can also be interpreted as 're-presentation', as in art or philosophy. This idea is based on Karl Marx's 'Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' (1852) in which he explains the difference between the German words *darstellen* (representation as an aesthetic portrait) and *vertreten* (representation by political proxy). Spivak's premise for really representing a subaltern group or to make their voice be heard, involves both meanings, the aesthetical as well as the political need to underpin the structures of representation (1988:66-70). But, as Stephan Morten sums it up so well:

The difference between aesthetic and political structures of representation is that aesthetic representation tends to foreground its status as a re-presentation of the real, whereas political representation denies this structure of representation. (2003:57)

Thus, the voice of the representative of the marginalized who claims to speak on their behalf is superordinated to the aesthetic representation. Therefore, the conflation of both meanings can have potentially harmful effects on the oppressed group. Especially the subaltern women are rather silenced than spoken for by Western feminism. According to Spivak, this is due to the fact that Western intellectuals use hegemonic vocabulary, which creates the term 'Third World' woman in the first place. To put it simply, the muteness of subaltern woman is created by the fact that their words are interpreted through conceptual and methodological procedures which are incapable to reflect their intentions with accuracy. Therefore, the problem does not lie in the subaltern's inability to speak, but in the inability of others to listen properly (McLeod 2010:67). For that reason, Spivak answers the question 'Can the subaltern speak?' negatively, which is a depressing conclusion for academics trying to give marginalized people a voice. McLeod has a similar attitude towards Spivak's findings and leaves the following questions to his readers:

For all of their brilliance and gravity, Spivak's conclusions can leave the critic feeling rather hamstrung. What is the point in trying to engage with oppressed voices if these voices are eternally doomed to perish due to the methods and concepts we use? If voicing resistance to colonialism is just as conceptually suspect as colonial discourses themselves, are we fated forever to be locked inside a discursive imperium, always serving not sundering colonial relations of power? (McLeod 2010:223)

This brings us to the Mayan population in Mexico. What about them, are they unable to speak due to our inability to relate to anything other than the dominant Western paradigm? At this point, it is interesting to return to Thomas Benjamin's essay 'A time of Reconquest: History, the Maya Revival and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas' in which he emphasizes the significance of history in order to feel self-recognition (2000). In his essay, Benjamin states that the conquistadores' denial of Indian history and their own dominant historical narratives, which are still dominant in contemporary Mexico, left the Mayan population without a past and, hence, without an identity. As a consequence, there was nothing that would "encourage pan-Mayan organization and action, make them an integral part of the Mexican nation, and empower them in their own eyes and in the eyes of society" (2000:422). Here, Spivak's critique on dominant knowledge-production can be applied. Western intellectuals see the Mayans as the oppressed people during colonial contest as objects,

instead of recognizing the indigenous people as subjects of their own history, since they are raised within the dominant discourses in Western history. In order to make the West hear the voices of the oppressed with accuracy, this dominant discourse needs to be attacked, which happened symbolically on the 12th of October 1992 when thousands of indigenous people destroyed the monument to the conquistador Diego de Mazariego in San Cristóbal de las Casas. One year and two months later, the same city was entered by the EZLN, who took up their arms against the Mexican government. The EZLN explained their decision to declare war as follows:

For our boys and girls there are no schools or medicine, there are no clothes or food, there is no dignified roof where we can keep our poverty [...]. That is how our boys and girls have lived and died for 501 years. We, their fathers, their mothers, their brothers and sisters, no longer wanted to be guilty of doing nothing. We sought peaceful solutions to attain justice and we found taunts, we found prison, we found blows, and we found death. We always found pain and sorrow. So we had to take the path of war, because what we asked for with our voices was never listened to. [...] We turned it against them, the big, the powerful, those who have it all and deserve nothing.

(Shadows of Tender Fury 1995:170-171)

In the documents written by the EZLN, the problem of the unheard indigenous voices is repeatedly a centre of analysis, which is an important point regarding Spivak's conclusions. Taking the distinction between aesthetical and political representation as a starting point, Spivak suggests that one needs to progress towards a theory of representation that acknowledges the need for the subaltern to be represented as in 'speaking for', while simultaneously recognizes the inaccessibility of the self-conscious voice of the subaltern, finally recognizing that the subaltern cannot speak, at all (1988).

The EZLN was able to address this problem of unheard voices, since the majority of the Zapatistas are indigenous and therefore have experienced their own muteness over the past five centuries. Nevertheless, the most heard voice of the Zapatistas belongs to their main spokesman, Subcomandante Marcos, who is of mestizo origin. At this point, the ability of the EZLN to represent indigenous people on their behalf seems questionable. However, the Subcomandante is refusing to reveal his real identity by covering his face with a ski mask. As Daniel Egan states, it serves as a 'vaccine against *caudillismo*' (*Shadows of Tender Fury* 1995:57) and as a reinforcement of the collective nature of the words he speaks (2006:70). Marcos, himself, insists that he functions as a 'mirror' for the oppressions, people are experiencing in Chiapas, adding little to it, "except his ability to translate homespun folklore into the language of resistance" (Tormey 2006:149) which can be interpreted as the

combination of aesthetical and political representation. Nevertheless, Marcos is also translating the voices of the Maya into a language which can be understood within the dominant Western paradigm. At this juncture, the role of Marcos is crucial in translating the voices of the indigenous people with accuracy. One can merely assume that he is capable of doing that, since he lived with the indigenous people since the 1980's in order to experience their way of life and exchange different arrays of knowledge (Benjamin 2000:421).

Unlike Spivak's argument that the subaltern cannot represent themselves in political terms, the majority of the Zapatista members have a clear indigenous identity, as mentioned earlier. The Zapatista Maya's are aware of the fact that their historical condition can only change through their own efforts (Gilbreth 2001:12-13). Although, the movement does not represent a political party, they do have explicit political goals which oppose the classic top-down character of democracy, promoting participatory or radical democracy. This form of democracy is important in two aspects. First, even though one needs to be careful with taking the EZLN as a representative for the Maya people as coherent political subjects, the bottom-up character of democracy creates space for the community member in the EZLN municipalities to speak. Secondly, in the broad sense, this can be seen as a breaking free from the dominant discourse and a creation of alternative ways which will be explained further in the next chapter. However, the following excerpt demonstrates other examples of the EZLN detecting dominant Western discourse in contemporary Mexican society:

If the voices of those who write history are not accurate, it is because the voice of the oppressed does not speak...not yet. There is no historic calendar, national, or regional, which records all the rebellions and protests against this bloody system, imposed and maintained by force throughout every region of the country. In Chiapas, this rebel voice is heard only when it shakes up the little world of the powerful. It is then that the ghost of the indigenous barbarian Jacinto Pérez resounds through the walls of the government palaces, and the powerful must rely on hot lead, traps, tricks, and threats.

(Shadows of Tender Fury 1995:47)

The EZLN thus points to the selectivity of the historical narrative produced by the Mexican government, which ignores significant events concerning the indigenous population in order to maintain certain power-relations. The prejudices about indigenous being barbarians, which is the counterpart to mestizos being civilized, is another point they criticize and, as mentioned earlier, also belongs to Spivak's criticism of the dominant Western paradigm.

This chapter, however, has shown that the Maya are able to produce audible voices in a world that is dominated by Western ways of thinking, which is contrasting with Spivak's

assumption that the subaltern cannot speak. Nevertheless, I argue that the indigenous population still is in a marginalized position, but they are able to be heard through the EZLN because the Zapatistas are the ones detecting these dominant Western ways and replacing them by their own alternatives. The next chapter will use Walter Mignolo's book *The Idea of Latin America* in order to have an even closer look on these alternative ways which are expressed in the EZLN ideology *Zapatismo*.

5. WALTER MIGNOLO – Alternative Production of Knowledge

The Argentine semiotician and professor at Duke University in the United States, Walter D. Mignolo has published extensively on literary theory and semiotics, and worked on different aspects of the modern and the colonial world, exploring concepts such as global coloniality, the geo-politics of knowledge and transmodernity. His main argument throughout his publications has been that modernity emerged from colonialism, instead of considering it as a historical development after or simply alongside the colonial period. According to him, "colonialism is the constitutive of modernity, of its teleological macro-narratives of human progress, and of the material base necessary to provide both, the surplus and the self-representation required to imagine Europe as the vanguard of the human race" (Alcoff 2007:83). To put this simply, colonialism is constitutive of the base as well as the superstructure of modernity.

In Mignolo's book *The idea of Latin America*, which will be of relevance in this chapter, the theoretical framework about modernity as prolonged colonialism is also a central argument. However, I like to distance myself from this rather radical statement; nevertheless, there are certain quite valuable points in his analysis about power-relations in Latin America. He uses the concept of *coloniality of power*, introduced by Quijano (2000), to explain that the colonized were subjected not simply to a greedy exploitation of all their resources but also to a hegemonic Eurocentric epistemology which still is dominant in the contemporary world. At this point, the crucial role of narrating history needs to be mentioned, once again. Mignolo emphasises that the dominant European narrative of 'discovering' Latin America, instead of 'inventing' it, played an important part in consolidating and expanding the Western world view. In the following excerpt, Mignolo explains the impact such a narrative had on the colonized subject:

Colonizing of being is nothing else than producing the idea that certain people do not belong to history – that they are non-beings. Thus, lurking beneath the European story of discovery are the histories, experiences, and silenced conceptual narratives of those who were

disqualified as human beings, as historical actors, and as capable of thinking and understanding. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries 'the wretched of the earth' (as Frantz Fanon labelled colonized beings) were Indians and African slaves. (2005:4)

Accordingly, hidden beyond the dominant discourse of Western knowledge, there lies an alternative map of knowledge and understanding which is needed to be shown in order to break free from the *logic of coloniality*. Walter Mignolo describes this term as working through the four interwoven domains of human experience: "(1) the economic: appropriation of land, exploitation of labour, and control of finance; (2) the political: control of authority; (3) the civic: control of gender and sexuality; and (4) the epistemic and the subjective: control of knowledge and subjectivity" (2005:11). Mignolo acknowledges that these structures will undergo radical change:

Now decolonization of knowledge and subjectivity, through the imagination of alternatives to capitalism and alternatives to the modern state and its reliance on military power, and through the creation of new ideologies other than the four mentioned [Marxism, Christianity, Liberalism, and Colonialism] is taking place. (2005:85-86)

This brings us to the Zapatistas and their way of deconstructing the dominant Western discourses. The previous chapters have already demonstrated that the EZLN released a comprehensive economic critique on the dominant paradigm of world capitalism and their struggle against the forgetting of the continued existence of structures of racism in the construction of knowledge. Besides civic issues concerning racism, the EZLN addresses the unequal position of women which is expressed in a document known as the "Zapatista Revolutionary Women's Law", passed through community-based consultation in 1993 (Ragasa 2008). A comprehensive analysis of the specific gendered agenda of the Zapatista women from a postcolonial perspective can be found in Magalí Rasaga's essay "Remembering Fanon: Zapatista Women & the Labor of Disalienation" (2008). I will proceed with the political critique of the EZLN which can be found in their ideology, known as Zapatismo. As Walter Mignolo claims, the ideology of the Zapatista movement cannot be categorized into one of the four dominant ideologies, mentioned in the above citation (2005:143). Although, Zapatismo features certain characteristics of Marxism, it demonstrates a refusal to fit into the schemes of former revolutionary agendas. As such, it represents a break with traditional Leftist theory which is, for instance, demonstrated by the fact that the Zapatistas reject the theory of permanent revolution. Moreover, the EZLN ripped off their ties with the entirety of the Mexican political class, including the institutional Left embodied in the Partido de La Revolución (PRD) (Reyes and Kaufmann 2011:505). It is impossible to

situate Zapatismo, as Holloway and Peláez suggest, into any of the classical Trotskyist, social democratic or anarchist movements (1998:24). Therefore, the Zapatista ideology can be seen as a new way of operating in politics. As Subcomandante Marcos formulated it in an interview, 'we are not Marxist-Leninists, we are Zapatistas' (EZLN 1994:300). Daniel Egan also argued that the EZLN distances themselves from the very important goal of traditional revolutionary movements, the seizure of state power. He states that Zapatismo does not represent a struggle for power, but opposes it (2006:69). In February 1994, Subcomandante Marcos wrote: "What would triumph be? Seizing power? No, something even harder to win: a new world order." (*Shadows of Tender Fury* 1995:109) This illuminates the Zapatistas' intention to create a new, alternative discourse, instead of following in the footsteps of Western thought. Furthermore, Egan notes that in the past revolutionaries have believed to achieve social transformations through control of the state apparatus. Meanwhile, the Zapatistas are convinced that social transformation is accomplished by, and marked by, a free and democratic space for political struggle (2006:69). In a letter to several newspapers, Marcos defined this social space as follows:

This democratic space will have three fundamental premises that are already historically inseparable: the democratic right of determining the dominant social project, the freedom to subscribe to one project or another, and the requirement that all projects must point the way to justice.

(*Shadows of Tender Fury* 1995:85)

In this space an active civil society can prosper which serves as a foundation for a truly democratic space, a position the state cannot claim or achieve.

These words already give an indication for an alternative form of democracy which the Zapatista refer to as *mandar-obedeciendo* [rule by obeying], their method for implementing autonomy. Through assembly that tendentially disperses power (through a series of shared responsibilities, mutual obligations, and the accountability and revocability of delegates), rule by obeying draws on the community practice of self-organization. As such, the accumulation of power is prevented and in effect, "this power exceeds the options between the rule of the one (i.e. sovereignty) and no rule (i.e. anarchy) by posing the possibility of the permanence of the rule of all" (Reyes and Kaufmann 2011:516). In the communiqué from the CCRI-CG of the EZLN, Subcomandante Marcos explained this method as follows:

It has always been our way that the will of the majority is in the hearts of the men and women who command. It was this majority will that determined the road that the leaders had to follow. If they strayed from this road, and didn't follow the word of the people, then the heart

of command had to be replaced by another who would obey, That is how our force was born in the mountains; those who command, obey if they are true leaders, and those who obey, command through the common heart of true men and women. A far-away word names this form of government, and this word that names road we have travelled since the time before words is 'democracy'. (Shadows of Tender Fury 1995:150)

According to conclusions of Reyes and Kaufman in their essay 'Sovereignty, Indigeneity, Territory: Zapatista Autonomy and the New Practices of Decolonization' (2011), the alternative definition of democracy, rule by obeying-strategy, and, simultaneously, their quest for autonomy can be identified as a strategy of decolonization, since Zapatismo is an innovated attempt to eliminate the colonial and paracolonial systems (2001:521).

Another very relevant thought within Zapatismo is the recognition by the EZLN that the emphasis on difference needs to be a prioritization. Subcomandante Marcos argues that the recognition of ethnical differences in politics is important in order to base political principles on tolerance and inclusion (Evans 2011:92). However, this point is very crucial regarding the deconstruction of all four domains within the logic of coloniality which becomes clear in the following citation of Marcos:

We are 'other' and different [...] we are fighting in order to continue being 'other' and different. [...] And what we are – far from wanting to impose its being in the 'other' or different – seeks its own space, and, at the same time, a space of meeting [...] that is why Power has its armies and police, to force those who are 'other' and different to be the same and identical. But the 'other' and different are not looking for everyone to be like they are. [...] The 'everyone doing his own thing' is both an affirmation of difference, and it is a respect for other differences. [Thus] When we say we are fighting for respect for our different and 'other' selves, that includes fighting for respect for those who are also 'other' and different, who are not like ourselves. (Egan 2011:93)

This emphasis on being different does imply abandoning the dominant Western idea that everyone is a part of the same paradigm, which classifies the world in developed and underdeveloped, civilized and uncivilized, democratic and undemocratic spaces. Moreover, the understanding of the other as the other denies the existence of a universal world view and acknowledges, instead, that different systems of knowledge can parallel.

The Zapatista movement created a new understanding of the term 'revolution', putting seizing of the state aside and using a new strategy for implementing bottom-up democracy. Furthermore, their new approach towards difference and otherness creates space for alternative discourse, in the first place. As Walter Mignolo puts it, the "Zapatistas' theoretical

revolution is building toward a future, towards an ideal of society not controlled by totalizing Western principles of knowledge and sovereignty of being" (2005:140).

6. Conclusion

By attempting to determine the significance a postcolonial approach could provide for interpreting the Zapatista movement, this thesis has illuminated certain important aspects through the application of several postcolonial theories. Applying Frantz Fanon's theory of racialization within colonialism on the Zapatista discourse has shown that there are many similarities between the colonial period and the situation the Mayans live in today. Even in contemporary Chiapas, racial structures remain connected to the economic inequalities created by the imperial nature of capitalism. Fanon as well as the Zapatista movement approach these inequalities in a similar way by, on the one hand, exposing them and on the other, emphasising the abandonment of an inferiority complex and accepting one's own culture. In a nutshell, both are trying to make the voices of the marginalized be heard. The manner in which the EZLN is able to speak on behalf of the Mayan population was approached through ideas of Gayatri Spivak. In her famous essay 'Can the subaltern speak?', Spivak creates awareness about the fact that speaking one's own voice is a very powerful form of resistance and self-affirmation. However, it is important to recognize that who is to hear this speech and how this could be understood by others depends on whether there is a shared meaning or discourse. To be more precise, Spivak argues that the West is incapable of understanding the subaltern because it relates anything to its own discourse. At this juncture, further research could address the question to what extent Marcos, as a mestizo, is really capable of representing the Mayans intentions with accuracy. Nevertheless, I argue that the EZLN succeeds to a certain degree to create space for the Mayans to speak by breaking free from the hegemonic discourse of Western thought. In what way this could have been accomplished was illustrated by the theories of Mignolo and a comprehensive examination of the Zapatista movement. The analysis demonstrated that the EZLN has developed an alternative definition of democracy which favours a bottom up-approach in which the civil society governs through rule-by-obeying. At this point, further research in the autonomous zones controlled by the EZLN could provide insights about the applicability of such an approach to democracy.

Examining the ideas of the Zapatista movement through a postcolonial lens offers a very fruitful notion in which to understand and appreciate the contribution the EZLN has made in deconstructing the seemingly universalistic nature of approaches as capitalism and

democracy. This is done by demonstrating that there are alternative ways to this dominant Western knowledge system. Speaking in more general terms, the ideas of the Zapatistas can serve as a model for other oppressed groups, since they create awareness about the social, economic and political oppressive structures, originating from the colonial period, which are maintaining the marginalization of the oppressed in the first place. Breaking free from the internalized inferiority complex and taking pride in one's own identity, as the Zapatistas have demonstrated, creates a crucial starting point for other marginalized groups to draw their own map of knowledge and understanding.

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