

Encuentro: One No, Many Yeses!

Encuentro, of course, literally means encounter. But an encounter between whom and whom? The Zapatista and Zapatista-inspired *encuentros* are designed as an occasion for the coming together of different sectors (structurally and/or culturally positioned formations and forces) and independent organizations. One assumption is that no individuals or representatives of organizations are representing the interests of the state or the market. Another assumption is that all of these formations have refused the logic of a status quo governed by national and international capitalist relations, state power, and their local manifestations. So these various formations share a common refusal, a common "NO!" but they may have various complementary or disjunctive "YESSES." A further assumption, and hopefully one shared by most of us by now, is that no single voice, organization, sector, or force can be privileged as the defining agent of revolutionary or historical transformation. In fact, the Zapatistas have themselves refused to impose their solutions or "yeses" on those with whom they are in dialogue.

In a recent communiqué, Subcomandante Marcos writes, "And what we are - far from wanting to impose its being on the 'other' or 'different' - seeks its own space, and, at the same time, a space of meeting" (Video Address to "From the Underground Culture and to the Culture of Resistance" Roundtable, 10/26/99). We might take this as one definition of "Zapatismo": the struggle for your own (however defined) history, identity, culture, space, labor, while also being committed to dialogue across boundaries and the possibilities of mutual transformation, but not a transformation that is imposed. The model of *encuentro*, as event and as process, depends on the mutual recognition of the dignity of the participants and is based on the hope that the common "NO!" may be clarified and strengthened and that the "Many Yeses" may intersect, join, diverge, grow, multiply, flourish as they may. Therefore, the goal of *encuentro* is not to breakdown or cross borders, barriers, and boundaries artificially or forcefully; but rather to imagine new horizons and then experience and respond to the intersections of these imaginings from their multiple sites of articulation.

If *encuentro* does not have a particular end goal in mind, the model can hardly guarantee the resolution of longstanding differences, tensions and antagonisms. Indeed, all of the *encuentros* held thus far have produced both vital new connections and shared projects as well as numerous disappointments. The success of any such gathering between

historically divergent formations may have as much to do with the experience, consciousness and grace of individuals as it does with ideology.

From the Underground Culture to the Culture of Resistance*

*The Sup's Words for the "From the Underground Culture to the Culture of Resistance" Roundtable
Alicia Multiforum.*

October 26, 1999.

I would like to thank those who were in charge of the Alicia Multiforum for the invitation they extended to us to participate in this Roundtable.

I do not have much experience in round tables, square tables are more our specialty, as the table most certainly must be where those who are accompanying this act are seated: Zack de la Rocha, Yaotl, Hermann Bellinghausen, Nacho Pineda, a *compa* from the Punk Anarchy collective and Javier Elorriaga.

And more, it is quite likely that the participants at this round table that is not round are seated on a small platform. And more, perhaps there is not even a table, and there are only a few chairs. Perhaps the only one who has a table is me, because they have to put the TV on something in order to show you this video.

Good, the fact is, at this round table, those who are participating cannot see each other's faces, something that would most certainly be happening if they were at a round table that were, in fact, round. And so here we are, sitting around a round table that is not round, and facing you, which is better, because from here I'm able to see a guy whose face is the best argument for leaving the issue of round and square tables in peace, and better that I don't tell you what that look is suggesting either (sigh).

Where was I? Oh, yes! That here we are, facing you, at that round table that I don't know who called "From Underground Culture to the Culture of Resistance." No, I don't have anything against whoever called this round table that isn't round that. The problem is that word that is repeated: "CULTURE." So many things fit there that, even though we are restricting them to the limits imposed by the words "Underground" and "Resistance," they would not do for a round table, no matter how square it might be, but rather for a great intercontinental *encuentro* that would last for light years, without even including the time taken up in arranging the microphone, greeting *raza*, or in staying asleep

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because someone has decided that culture can also be boring and has set about demonstrating it.

Having said that, I am not going to talk to you about underground culture, nor about the culture of resistance, nor about the bridge that most certainly joins them. In addition to leaving the issue for those who are accompanying us at that table that we are calling round even knowing that it is square, I will avoid making myself appear ridiculous and I will be able to conceal my encyclopedic ignorance on this subject. As the greatest and well-loved Don Durito of La Lacandona would say, "There is no problem sufficiently great that it cannot be pondered upon." I would add to those wise words that cause the action and the commitment, "nor is there a round table that is not square."

I know that you are all anxious to know what in the hell I'm going to talk about then. More than one of you might be asking if the guitar I have by my side means that I'm going to play a song, one of those that are so honorably played in the Mexico of below, which we all are.

But no, I'm not going to play any songs. The guitar is for the surprise appearance we're going to make tomorrow, October 27, 1999, with "Rage Against the Machine," "Aztlán Underground" and "Tijuana NO" at the Sports Palace. Well, that's if they don't censor us first, or if the law doesn't show up, in which case the concert will be held in the prison closest to your hearts.

And, I'm going to be sincere with you, this entire initial litany has been to use up time, because the organizers made it quite clear to me that I was to speak for some 20 minutes, and I believe that 20 minutes are too long to say that I'm not going to speak to you about underground culture, nor about the culture of resistance, nor about the relationship between the one and the other.

You know? We are *guerreros*. Some very otherly *guerreros*, but, at the end of the day, some *guerreros*. And we *guerreros* know a few things. And among the few things that we know, we know about weapons.

So, better that I talk to you about weapons. Specifically, I'm going to talk to you about the weapon of resistance.

We, besides being *guerreros*, are Mexican indigenous. We live in the mountains of the Mexican Southeast, which is turning out to be the last corner of this country. We live like the majority of the indigenous in Mexico live, that is, very badly.

Our homes have dirt floors, our walls are of sticks or mud, and our roofs are of laminate, cardboard or grass. One single room serves for kitchen, dining room, bedroom, living room and henhouse. Our

foods are, basically, maize, beans, chili, and the vegetables that grow in the garden. For medicine we have some little popular pharmacy, poorly stocked. Doctors? In our dreams. The school, if it is not being occupied by the government's soldiers, is a hall, where up to 4 different groups of students coexist at the same time, and who are not very numerous, because our children start working when they're very small, between 4 and 5 years old, the women carrying wood, grinding maize, washing clothes and taking care of their younger brothers and sisters; when they're between 10 and 12, the boys, to the mountain, taking care of the livestock, carrying wood, working the fields, the coffee plantations or the pasture. Our lands are poor in two senses: they are poor because they are ours, who are poor as a matter of course. And they are poor because they yield little in the way of harvest. We have only mud and rocks, the *finqueros* have the good lands. The livestock and coffee that we sell to make money, we sell to the *coyotes*, who are a kind of intermediary, who pay us up to 10 times less than the price of our products in the market. And, so, our work, in addition to being hard, is badly paid.

However, even though we live like most of the indigenous population in the country, that is, in poverty, we do not live the same as most of the indigenous population. Our poverty is the same as the poverty of the others, but it is different, it is "other" poverty. We are poor because that is what we chose. From the beginning of our uprising, they have offered us everything to get us to sell ourselves, to surrender.

If we had done so, if we had surrendered, if we had sold ourselves, we would now have good houses, good schools, hospitals, machinery for working the land, better prices for our products, good food.

But we chose not to sell ourselves, we chose not to surrender. Because it so happens that we are indigenous and we are also *guerreros*. And *guerreros* are *guerreros* because they are fighting for something. And we, the Zapatistas, are fighting for good homes, good food, good health, a good price for our work, good lands, good education, respect for the culture, the right to information, liberty, independence, justice, democracy and peace. Yes, we are fighting for all of that, but for everyone, not just for ourselves. That is why we Zapatistas are *guerreros*, because we want "For everyone, everything, nothing for ourselves."

If we had surrendered, if we had sold ourselves, we would no longer have been poor, but others would have continued to be so.

Good, but you are asking yourselves: Where is the weapon that this handsome, attractive, nice *guerrero* was going to talk to us about? I'll tell you now.

It happened that, when they saw that we were not surrendering, that we were not selling ourselves, the government began attacking us in order to force us to surrender and to sell ourselves. They offered us many things, money, projects, aid, and, if we rejected them, they became angry and they threatened us. That is how we came to understand that, by refusing to accept government aid, by resisting, then, we made the powerful angry. And there is nothing a Zapatista *guerrero* likes more than making the powerful angry. And so, with singular joy we dedicated ourselves to resisting, to saying “no,” to transforming our poverty into a weapon. The weapon of resistance.

Almost 6 years of war have now spoken with that weapon, with it we have resisted more than 60,000 soldiers, war tanks, bomber aircraft, artillery helicopters, cannons, machine guns, bullets and grenades. With it, we have resisted the lie.

If you would like me to sum it up, I would tell you that we made ourselves soldiers like that so that one day soldiers would no longer be necessary, as we also remain poor, so that one day there will no longer be poverty. This is what we use the weapon of resistance for.

Obviously, it is not the only weapon we have, as is clear from the metal that clothes us. We have other arms. For example, we have the arm of the word. We also have the weapon of our culture, of our being what we are. We have the weapon of music, the weapon of dance. We have the weapon of the mountain, that old friend and *compañera* who fights along with us, with her roads, hiding places and hillsides, with her trees, with her rains, with her suns, with her dawns, with her moons...

We also have the weapons that we carry by nature, but it is not the time to be going around punning, much less now, when you’ve all become very serious. And, in order to chase away your seriousness, I’m going to tell you a joke, no, don’t believe it or be frightened, I’m not going to tell you a joke, better that we leave that to Zedillo, who, as president, is nothing but a bad joke. No, better that I go on to the next issue that I’m going to talk to you about.

Music and Resistance. Notably Rock, but not just rock. Notably music groups, but not just music groups. I mean, not just what we see and listen to, but also what makes our seeing and listening possible. Because *raza* gets down when it listens to Rage Against the Machine, to Aztlan Underground, to Tijuana No. Or to “Durito Against the Sup” (which is a group that’s going to be formed if Durito keeps on giving me whooping cough).

Where was I? Ah yes! That *raza* gets down when it listens to a good music group, and then one feels

ones bones and muscles being controlled by nothing other than the heart and one starts moving, shaking, jumping, a little step here and another little step there, getting together, a “*prexta pa la orquesta*” (I already know that everyone is thinking: son of a bitch, the Sup is talking like a *pachuco* from the Tin Tan or Piporro films, but, whatever, *raza*) well, they dance then, and they don’t think about those who are making it possible for that group to be listened to, and that we have a place and a reason to dance. For example, the other day I was listening to some cuts from a group that plays heavy heavy (since it so happens that I am “educating my ear,” because before the war I was just into folk dances and polkas, *ajua*) and just Zapatistas and it happens that I took a look at the introduction to the cassette or to the compact disc, and I read that there are tons of people involved, in addition to those who play it, and I believe the musicians do recognize the work of all these people, but those of us who are listening or dancing just don’t. For example, here we are in the self-named “Alicia MultiForum” and here is Zack, Yaotl, Pineda, the *compa* from Punk Anarchy, Elorriaga, and this video that you are being forced to watch and listen to, because what you wanted was to listen to Zack and Yaotl, and not talking exactly, but partying with a song. Good, I said here we are in this place, and whoever organized this round table that is square, whoever or whatever is responsible for the sound being heard well or badly, whoever takes care of this building, whoever keeps it going, whoever opened this space so that you and we could meet, whoever then. There it is. We don’t have any idea. No way, their place is to in the background. But, then, I’m proposing to you, for all those people who are back there, that we give them a round of applause that can be heard even in the back, and don’t leave them out, because, if not, neither round table, nor square, nor concert, nor *maiz palomas naranjas dridas que jais de la guirinais*. Applaud, then.

(Applause continues)

(If the applause takes a while, push “stop” on the video, because, if not, I’m going to continue and no one can fight me).

All done now? Good, then the subject was, what is Music and Resistance. But, as I already explained before, as far as music goes I’m just do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-si, and I still get it wrong, but we are a bit smart about resistance. The fact is that zapatismo and rock bring and carry something, because, if not, what are Zack and Yaotl and I doing here (because I’m also a rocker, but an “old-fashioned” one), sitting at a round table which, as everyone has seen, is square.

Good. If we say that zapatismo “rebounded” in rock groups and in that way produced its “other” and

“different” effect, I believe we would be being unfair. We are talking about groups with a long tradition of social commitment and professional independence. What happened? Who knows. Perhaps many round tables are necessary, even though they be square, in order to look at the issue of rock and zapatismo.

Perhaps what happened is there was a meeting. There were words that met, but, above all, there were, and are, feelings that met. If there are songs from these groups that could easily appear to be *communiqués*, and if there are *communiqués* that could be lines to songs, it is not by virtue of who is writing them, no, it is because they are saying the same thing, they are reflecting the same thing, that underground “other,” which, by being “different,” organizes itself in order to resist, in order to exist.

Because it is not just the Zapatistas who are *guerreros* of resistance. There are many groups (and there are several gathered together here) who have also made a weapon of resistance, and they are using it. And there are all, there are indigenous, there are workers, there are women, there are homosexuals, there are lesbians, there are students, there are young people. Above all there are young people, men and women, who name their own identities: “punk,” “ska,” “goth,” “metal,” “trasher,” “rapper,” “hip-hopper” and “etceteras.” If we look at what they all have in common, we will see that they have nothing in common, that they are all “different.” They are “others.” And that is exactly what we have in common, that we are “other,” and “different.” Not only that, we also have in common that we are fighting in order to continue being “other” and “different,” and that is what we are resisting for. And we are “other” and “different” to the powerful, or we are not like they want us to be, but rather just as we are.

And what we are -- far from wanting to impose its being on the “other” or “different” -- seeks its own space, and, at the same time, a space of meeting. The “punks” don’t go around on a campaign demanding that all young people be “punks,” nor do the “ska,” or the “goths,” or the “metal,” or the “trashers,” or the rappers, or, certainly, the indigenous. Nonetheless. The Power does indeed want us to be how they want us to be, want us to dress according to the style the Power dictates, want us to talk the way he says, want us to eat what he sells, want us to consider beautiful and lovely what he considers beautiful and lovely, even want us to love and hate the way he establishes that love and hate should be. And not just that, the Power also wants us to do all this on our knees and in silence, without going around jumping, without shouts, without indigenous uprisings, well-mannered. That is why the Power has 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. As if each one is saying that everyone has his own way or his own thing (I don’t know how that’s said now) and, in order for this to be possible, it is not enough to just be, you also must always respect the other. The “everyone doing his own thing” is double: it is affirmation of difference, and it is respect for the other difference. 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. And it is here where this entire resistance movement -- called “underground” or “subterranean,” because it takes place among those of below and underneath institutional movements -- meets *zapatismo*.

And this meeting is a meeting between *guerreros* and *guerreras*, among those who make resistance a weapon, and who fight with it in order to be what they are, in order to exist.

Or, when Zapatistas say “we want a world where many worlds fit,” they are not discovering anything new, they are simply saying what the “other” and “different” who walk the worlds of below have already said.

We Zapatistas say “I am as I am and you are as you are, we are building a world where I can be, without having to cease being me, where you can be, without having to stop being you, and where neither I nor you force another to be like me or like you.” Or, as when the Zapatistas say “a world where many worlds fit,” they are saying, more or less, “everyone does his own thing.”

And, before you start putting on airs, I’ll go on to another subject on the same subject.

Because it so happens then that, because we are different, we are the same. We are the same persecuted, the same despised, the same beaten, the same imprisoned, the same disappeared, the same assassinated. And it is not ours who are persecuting, despising, beating, imprisoning, assassinating us. It is not even the “others” from below. It is the Power and their names. And our crimes are not stealing, beating, assassinating, insulting. Nor is our crime being “other” and “different.” No, our crime is in being so, and in being proud of being so. Our crime -- which in the Power’s penal code merits the death penalty -- is the struggle we are making to continue being “other” and “different.” If we were “other” and “different” shamefully, in hiding, guiltily, betrayed by ourselves, trying to be, or to appear to be, what the Power wants us to be or to appear to be, then they would give us an indulgent and pitying little pat, and they would tell

us that “they are things of youth, you will get over it with age.” For the Power, the medicine against rebellion is time, “since it will go away with age.”

Lie, what the Power is not saying is what is behind “that age” that it assumes will cure and do away with youthful rebellion. Hours, months, years of blows, of insults, of jails, of deaths, of rapes, of persecutions, of neglect, a machinery working to “cure us” if we stop being what we are and if we turn ourselves into servile beings, or which will eliminate us if we insist on being what we are, without regard to calendar, birthdays or the date on the birth certificate.

And so, then, we are all transgressors of the law. Because there is a law in this system that kills and silences those who are “other” and “different.” And, by living, by shouting, by talking, that is, by being rebels, we are transgressing that law, and we are, automatically, criminals.

And these criminals that we are, we live in a rebel reality, where resistance is a bridge for us to meet, recognizing our difference and our equality. And rock is also like a bridge over which those realities walk in order to meet.

In what way is rock a mirror and crystal for this very “other” and “different” reality? The truth is, I do not know and I do not understand. I look at and listen to groups like Rage Against the Machine and Tijuana NO (to mention just those who are participating in tomorrow’s concert, but knowing that there are many others, and that all of them are good -- as musicians and as human beings), and I ask myself why do they do what they do, say what they say, and play what they play. I believe it would be better for them to tell us what goes on with them. Perhaps it so happens that they are also asking themselves why we Zapatistas are doing what we are doing, saying what we are saying and playing what we are playing (although, when it comes to rock, we are fairly useless. “Useless.”: How about that? A good name for a group or for a song. “Useless,” like that, with no qualifiers, so that everyone fits, men, women, and those who are neither men nor women, but who are).

And, the reason for this video is to answer why we Zapatistas are doing what we are doing, saying what we are saying and playing what we are playing, but, since I’ve gone over the 20 minutes I had, it will remain open. At best, what I said earlier might help in finding the answer.

Sale, then, *raza*, *banda*, *compas*, *chompiras*, *valedores*, *neros*, *gueyes*, or, as that international philosopher who is now dressing as a pirate, Durito, says, “everyone doing his own thing.”

Then, Elorriaga’s thing shall follow, who will, in his turn, tell us whose thing is to follow,

Bellinghausen’s, Zack’s, Yaotl’s, Pineda’s, the *compa* from Punk Anarchy’s, or I don’t know whose thing then, because, because they might have put me in the middle (which would be in verrrry bad taste), or left me to the end, so that the *raza* would already be asleep and wouldn’t have to hear the outrageous things I’m saying here.

Vale. Salud and (like it says on the cover of that fanzine that has the good taste to call itself “ZUPterraneo”), and with such a thing, “something doesn’t smell right,” which means something like “there are things and then there are things.” *Salud!*

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast
The Sup, tuning up his guitar for the “special appearance.”

Mexico, “other” and “different,”

October, 1999.



ACCION ZAPATISTA

Accion Zapatista (AZ) is an organization that gathers and redistributes information about the Zapatistas and the struggle for democracy in Mexico. We protest US support of the Mexican government, and support local struggles that challenge neo-liberal policies and institutions. Because events in different regions are related by the brutal logic of global capital, we invite your input in developing new strategies of organizing and an ongoing understanding of the interconnections between local and international struggles. AZ maintains a communications network designed to link local struggles <accion-zapatista@lists.cc.utexas.edu>. The AZ network allows individuals and organizations to collaborate with AZ via the internet in order to participate in debate, post important information, request relevant data, present opinions and insights and be informed of upcoming events or actions in the Austin area.

For more information on the Zapatistas:
<http://www.utexas.edu/students/nave>