

CHARLES LINDHOLM and JOSÉ PEDRO ZÚQUETE

The STRUGGLE for the WORLD



LIBERATION MOVEMENTS
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Liberation Movements for the 21st Century

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José Pedro Zúquete

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free, archival-quality paper

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lindholm, Charles, 1946–

The struggle for the world : liberation movements for the 21st century / Charles Lindholm and José Pedro Zúquete.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

9780804774222

1. Anti-globalization movement. 2. Social movements. 3. Millennialism—Political aspects. 4. World politics—21st century. I. Zúquete, José Pedro. II. Title.

JZ1318.L56 2010

322.4—dc22

200903825

Typeset by Thompson Type in 10/14 Minion Pro

To My Mother
Maria de Lourdes Zúquet

To the Memory of Nate Raymond

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PREFACE

THIS BOOK IS A COLLABORATION between a European political scientist and an American anthropologist. Despite our different disciplinary backgrounds, each of us has a strong interest in the culture, history, psychology, and structure of social movements and political organizations. Zúquete has written about the “missionary politics” of populist movements and issues of identity and culture in contemporary times; Lindholm has written about charisma and authenticity and has made cross-national studies of power and compliance. In conversations about our own work, we realized that although the world-saving groups we were studying often present themselves as totally opposed to one another, they seem to share a great deal, structurally, ideologically, and experientially. These similarities were ignored by most studies, so we decided to explore them. The resulting text is a truly cooperative endeavor. Each of the authors has substantially contributed to every chapter, and we have shared the burdens and pleasures of reading, commenting, and editing through many drafts. At times the labor did feel of worldwide proportions due to the abundance and enormous variety of material and sources at hand. “Yours in struggle!” soon became a common way of ending our many e-mail exchanges. Maybe the reader will appreciate the irony. We certainly do.

While the book was written, the world, at least according to the media, seemed to be on the verge of an abyss. Dark predictions about the future loomed everywhere. It looked as though the lonely bearded man standing on the corner of the street holding a sign proclaiming the imminent end of the world was right after all. Prophecies of disaster, of course, are as old as humankind. But the beginning of the twenty-first century seemed especially prone to dismal predictions about the environment, the global economy, or the explosion of religious and ethnic conflicts. It was as if the “struggle for the world” was the struggle to redeem a world that was already ruined. The book is our reflection on and analysis of these fears and anxieties, which, although specific to the era, are universal in their implications. Our aim is to shed light on the ways in which people imagine salvation from the ills of today and pursue a better world in the future.

In order to give credit to the actors’ own understandings and experiences, we have used the methodology of “archival anthropology.” Most of our data come directly from the ways the groups portray themselves in their internal communiqués, their propaganda, their statements of purpose, and other public presentations and performances. We have also used member’s personal accounts, and we have referred as well to commentaries from writers who have had firsthand experience of the particular movement. Whenever possible, we have read these texts and accounts in their original languages (English, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish).

From our analysis of a wide variety of concrete cases, we reveal the fundamental similarities existing among movements that look very different on the surface. Our intent is to take an initial, but essential, step to a comprehensive and realistic understanding of the political and spiritual climate of our times. At the end of our project, after identifying the shared features, dynamics, and goals of utopian resistance to globalization, we summarize our findings, consider why these commonalities exist, and interpret their implications.

Our task in this book is not to judge the validity or morality of any of the antiglobalization movements that we discuss. Although we do not see ourselves as detached observers standing on Olympian heights, for the most part we have foresworn enthusiastic endorsements as well as expressions of skepticism or scorn. Our goal has simply been to illustrate, contextualize, compare, and make some sense of some of the most powerful alternatives to globalization. Whether readers like the destination, we hope they will still enjoy the ride.

We very much appreciate the support and wise advice of our editor at Stanford University Press, Kate Wahl. We are also glad to have had the pleasure of working with Jennifer Helé. Joa Suorez was always very helpful in getting the manuscript ready for publication, as was our expert copyeditor, Margaret Pinette.

We are grateful as well to the two anonymous reviewers who commented on the manuscript and suggested ways of improving it. We thank those who, at one point or another, took their time to comment on drafts or generously provided us with original material: John Barnes, Nigel Copsey, Carlos de la Torre, Sarah Garton, Jenny Huberman, Courtney Jung, Pierre Krebs, Siv Lie, Richard Loren, Nancy Postero, Matt Stefon, Marco Tarchi, Michael Walker, Rob Weller, Lew Wurgaft, and Bernard Yack. A great deal of the research for the book was done at Harvard University, and we are much indebted to the staff at Widener Library as well to the Center for European Studies and its executive director, Trisha Craig. We are also obliged to Deirdre Habershaw at Boston University for her diligent work in preparing the manuscript.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to our families for sustaining us throughout this journey: António Zúquete, the Silveira Zúquete family, and Cherry Lindholm. To all of them, as always, our thanks.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE WORLD

*If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst.*¹

—**Thomas Hardy**

*These days of universal death must be days of universal newbirth, if the ruin is not to be total and final!*²

—**Thomas Carlyle**

BRINGING A NEW DAWN

According to an ancient Chinese proverb “It’s better to be a dog in times of peace than to be a human being wandering in times of chaos.”³ Today we cannot live as peaceful dogs. For modern human beings, the only choice is to persevere through the tumult of what has increasingly been defined as the “global century.” In fact, if one word could encapsulate the zeitgeist of our time, the strongest contender would surely be *globalization*.⁴ Although the present-day flow of commodities and consequent interconnectedness between peoples and cultures has many historical antecedents,⁵ globalization in its twenty-first century form is unique in its intensity, range, speed, and transformative technology.⁶ The shelves of bookstores groan under the weight of texts that seek to refine, expand, or reinterpret the meaning and significance of this new phenomenon. Some have argued that because of globalization the world has become flat, while others say it is still a very rugged place.⁷ We do not intend to add to this already too copious literature.

Instead we set our sights on analysis of some of the many political organizations and social movements that fervently oppose capitalist globalization. We call them aurora movements because they promise a new liberating dawn that will banish the dark injustices of the previous era. As a Zapatista manifesto puts it: “If this world does not have a place for us, then another world must be made . . . What is missing is yet to come.”⁸ This is only one example of popular protest against the insecurity and rootlessness associated with the “explosion” of the free market ideology.⁹ It began in the 1990s as violent street protests and increased support for antisystem populist-nationalists spread from Latin America to Europe. The collapse of the financial systems in Asia led to widespread panic and riots culminating at the end of the old millennium in the “Battle of Seattle,” where thousands of demonstrators, ranging from traditional trade unionists to militant ecological activists, took over the streets in protest against the meeting of the World Trade Organization. Although the protest was

quelled, it engendered a new unity (however fleeting) among a wide variety of opponents to the globalization process.

The 9/11 jihadist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon brought a new phase to the struggle, demonstrating that some zealots were quite willing to destroy this world to bring another. The military conflicts that ensued were felt by those on both the antiglobal left and antiglobal right as a confirmation that imperialism and war were the touchstones of an inhuman globalization based on suffering and misery. And so the twenty-first century was born in fire, fury, and blood. Subsequently a global financial meltdown raised fresh doubts about the sustainability of the path taken by neoliberal globalization and added increased urgency to the search for radical alternatives to save a world apparently plunging into chaos.

Oppositional movements can be purely instrumental, but the ones we will discuss have much higher ambitions. They span the political spectrum from right-wing groups and activist intellectuals in Europe to left-wing political parties in Latin America, along with the “movement of movements”—the World Social Forum. We included as well groups with no apparent “wings” at all, such as Muslim “holy warriors,” nomadic ravers, and the international “slow” movement. These groups gain inspiration from multiple contexts, cultures, and traditions. Some seek to recapture lost indigenous truths; some preach universalism; others worship the nation; while jihadists hope to return Islam to its primal roots. The more leftist of this varied lot have generally defined themselves as *alter*-globalizing or as “global justice” movements, to distinguish themselves from *antiglobalist* groups on the right, which are portrayed by their opponents as nationalistic, restrictive, and politically conservative.¹⁰ We shall show that the mind-set of the aurora movements blurs the old right/ left distinction. As will become evident, whether they come from the right or left or from someplace completely different, they all wish to redirect the course of history and inaugurate a new world where human potentials are realized, justice reigns, and happiness is universal. All are more active than contemplative, polarizing, rather than pragmatic. Their shared goal is to defy and transform, not adjust and reform.

These groups are also alike in that they are at one and the same time reflections and shadows of globalization. As active opponents to global processes, they must propose solutions that are global in their ramifications, while also reversing the order of the present. So, the affirmation of difference implies the construction of an alternative belief system with many of the same universalizing characteristics found in global capitalism. Just as global capitalism is accused of affecting *all* areas of life, the changes pursued by these oppositional groups are *total*. All these activists tend to see themselves as soldiers in an existential battle¹¹ for redemption of the world from the evils of globalization. They are, they believe, engaged in a life-or-death conflict between two expansionist models of the human future—one rational, bureaucratic, commercial, and immoral; the other spiritual, humane, heartfelt, and righteous. This battle, in its various permutations, is the subject of our book.

THE PAST OF THE STRUGGLE FOR THE FUTURE

In many ways the search for a new world is nothing new. Throughout Western history, there has been no shortage of movements that strive to abolish the injustice, indignity, and inhumanity of the present. Popular rebellions in the form of peasant uprisings and urban revolts were a significant force all throughout premodern times. Though many were driven by specific complaints (against taxation, for instance), others aimed to completely transform society. Millenarian movements built on a Christian narrative of sin, purification, and redemption were devoted to ushering in a promised land of eternal peace, prosperity, and happiness.¹² For example, in the early sixteenth century, the Anabaptist messiah Jan Bockelson declared the death of the old world and the advent of a new age of free love

and equality. In the German city of Münster (heralded as the “New Zion”), 10,000 of his followers held off the army for a year before their final defeat and annihilation.¹³ And in seventeenth-century England, “it seemed as though the world might be turned upside down” by the radical passions of the Levellers and the Diggers.¹⁴

The French Revolution of 1789 was undoubtedly the most influential, ambitious, and successful effort to transform the world; it was fueled by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, who, in the name of reason, questioned the existing traditions, superstitions, and institutions of the age. By eroding the foundations of the taken-for-granted universe, these thinkers opened the way for the revolutionary deluge. Gracchus Babeuf, swept along by the flood of history, prophesied that “all should return to chaos, in order that out of the chaos a new and rejuvenated world emerges.”¹⁵ As the romantic French historian Jules Michelet described the Revolution: “The world is waiting for a faith, to march forward again, to breathe and to live . . . Everything has gravitated towards one point, and that point now speaks forth; it is a unanimous prayer from the heart of France.”¹⁶ Inspired by the unifying “prayer from the heart of France,” a surge of movements aimed at the regeneration of humankind swept through nineteenth-century Europe and beyond. “No period before or after has experienced so luxurious a flowering of Utopian schemes purporting to offer a coherent, complete, and final solution to the problem of social evil.”¹⁷ Dostoevsky described the prevalent revolutionary attitude in his novel *The Possessed* as a “fire in the minds of men.”¹⁸ The revolutionary flame burned bright in Karl Marx’s impassioned declaration of communism as the liberating last stage of history. The 20th century would turn many of these utopian impulses into actual projects to liberate man from the evils of history, starting with the soviet attempt to make the communist ideal a reality. The sense of a “new beginning” and the belief that “history itself was at a turning point” also nurtured the fascist quest “to purge civilization of decadence, and foster the emergence of a new breed of human beings which it defined in terms not of universal categories but essentially mythic national and racial ones.”¹⁹ The hope for radical transformation carried over into the Third World as well, where many anticolonial liberation movements promised not only the pragmatic advantages of an autonomous nation-state but also the launching of an entirely new epoch in human history. This millenarian intention was clear in the writings of Frantz Fanon, the intellectual prophet of the Third World anticolonial struggle, for whom “decolonization is not merely the establishment of a New State or the achievement of Sovereignty but the replacement of one species of man by another species of man. The world is turned upside down, the last become the first.”²⁰ According to Fanon, the struggle against colonialism “infuses a new rhythm [into existence], specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men.”²¹ Symbolic performances such as the so-called cargo cults²² that flourished among indigenous peoples in the Pacific islands and elsewhere during the mid-twentieth century also aimed at overturning colonial authority in preparation for the imminent arrival of a new golden age. So did the “Grounded Utopian Movements” such as the Rastafarians in Jamaica, the American Indian Ghost Dance religion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the Guatemalan Maya movement of the 1980s (among others).²³

Sadly, Marx’s utopian program of liberation provided the ideological justification for totalitarianism, the fascist project descended into the horrors of the Holocaust, the regimes of decolonized states often proved to be as exploitative and brutal as their colonial predecessors, and the bounty promised by the cargo cults did not materialize. In the era of “the God that failed,” it seemed that dreams of a blissful new age had become nightmares instead. As a result of these catastrophes, postwar antiutopian intellectuals from both the left and right repudiated any possibility of collective

emancipation. On the right, Karl Popper portrayed utopian blueprints as inevitably dangerous, pernicious, and self-defeating. Ideal societies are known “only from our dreams and from the dreams of our poets and prophets. They cannot be discussed, only proclaimed from the housetops. They do not call for the rational attitude of the impartial judge, but for the emotional attitude of the impassioned preacher.”²⁴ From the left, Hannah Arendt asked: “And what else, finally, is this ideal of modern society but the age-old dream of the poor and destitute, which can have a charm of its own so long as it is a dream, but turns into a fool’s paradise as soon as it is realized?”²⁵ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who had intimate experience of one such “fool’s paradise,” knew where the blame lay: “Thanks to *ideology*, the twentieth century was fated to experience evil-doing on a scale calculated in the millions. This cannot be denied, nor passed over, nor suppressed.”²⁶

Others concurred. For Raymond Aron the time had come to “challenge all the prophets of redemption” and to celebrate the “advent of the skeptics.”²⁷ Judith Shklar agreed that “the urge to construct grand designs for the political future of mankind is gone. The last vestiges of utopian faith required for such an enterprise have vanished,”²⁸ while Daniel Bell proclaimed that chiliastic hopes, millenarianism, apocalyptic thinking, and ideology itself had come to “a dead end.”²⁹ In this same period Otto Kirchheimer described the transformation of the ideological mass parties of old into political machines, centrist and practical, constructed with the sole purpose of winning elections. Instead of organizations devoted to provide “spiritual shelter” and a “vision of things to come,” the new type of parties would be committed to efficient, narrow, short-term goals suited to a time of “deideologization.”³⁰

However, the normative end-of-ideology narrative was seriously challenged in the 1960s and 1970s by liberation theologies, hippie and drug subcultures, civil rights crusades, antiwar activism, feminist protests, and a New Left committed to overturning “the system” and to achieving a total transformation of the modern world. The content of the dreamed-of utopia differed in its details but usually included the elimination of sexual and other taboos, the end of violence, the establishment of complete equality, and the rise of all-embracing communities of love and sharing. As the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) declared in 1962, “If we appear to seek the unattainable, as it has been said, then let it be known that we do so to avoid the unimaginable.”³¹ Or, as the protestors who took over the streets of Paris in 1968 declared: “In a society that has abolished all adventures, the only adventure left is to abolish society.”³²

Although these utopian visions failed, their reappearance led some to rethink the end-of-ideology paradigm. While remaining a proponent of rational liberalism, Isaiah Berlin took note of the resurgence of the “age-old dream” that “there is, there must be—and it can be found—the final solution to all human ills.”³³ The Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski resigned himself to the “unavoidable” and “irreconcilable” conflict between skeptical and utopian mentalities. “The victory of utopian dreams would lead us to a totalitarian nightmare and the utter downfall of civilization, whereas the unchallenged domination of the skeptical spirit would condemn us to a hopeless stagnation, to an immobility that a slight accident could easily convert into catastrophic chaos.”³⁴ Anthropologist Victor Turner took a more positive view of utopianism arguing that carnivalesque upsurges of “liminality” and celebratory egalitarian “communitas” are necessary to offset an overly rigid social order.³⁵

But the majority of intellectuals remained certain that there were no possible positive alternatives to the status quo. Utopian movements were merely aberrations, soon to be subsumed in the inevitable march toward a rational future. This perspective received powerful confirmation with the

disintegration of the Soviet Union. Its collapse was taken as convincing evidence that the predicted “end” of history had indeed arrived, as well as the end of ideology and the end of revolution. Indeed, it seemed the Western world had entered a period of “endism”³⁶ in which transformative utopias were no longer to be imagined.³⁷ Bureaucratic rationalism, it seemed, had crushed all rivals; representative democracy had emerged victorious; industrial capitalism was eternally triumphant. The only future imaginable was the “weary utopianism” of the unfettered free market as realized in the pure entrepreneurial spaces of monochromatic export processing zones.³⁸ Though some waves would continue to ripple across the surface, stormy conflicts over what political and economic (not to mention spiritual) systems should govern human affairs had been permanently settled. Francis Fukuyama, the most eloquent spokesman for this perspective, wistfully remarked in 1989 that “the end of history will be a very sad time.” Nonetheless, the “worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism” was a thing of the past. It had been “replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands.”³⁹

Other social scientists and public intellectuals of the late twentieth century agreed that humanity had indeed permanently entered into a postrevolutionary era.⁴⁰ The worldwide spread of rationalism and capitalism had decisively eliminated all traces of outmoded radicalism except among the most inconsequential groups. War also had been finally understood to be repulsive, uncivilized, and economically counterproductive; it would soon follow the path of dueling and slavery and simply cease to exist.⁴¹ Even the nation would soon disappear, according to the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm. As he wrote: Despite “men’s and women’s longing for group identity” and notwithstanding ethnic “reactionary upheavals,” a “new supranational restructuring of the globe” would “inevitably supersede nation-states.”⁴²

The appearance of violent apocalyptic sects in the latter part of the twentieth century, such as Jim Jones’s Peoples Temple (whose members laid down their lives in what Jones called an “act of revolutionary suicide protesting the conditions of an inhumane world”),⁴³ the Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, and the Order of the Solar Temple, among others, were explained as vestiges of a bygone age of zealotry and irrational belief, reminding the majority how far humanity had advanced on the road toward its predestined goal of pragmatic reason. These sects and their destructive trajectories confirmed that it was time to “return millenarianism to the religious realm, where it belongs.”⁴⁴ From this perspective, expressions of apocalyptic imagination and the radical pursuit of transcendence would perhaps continue to exist, but only among a few religious fanatics and pathetic remnants of the 1960s.

Though there was strong dissent from the majority opinion:⁴⁵ With reluctance, nostalgia, and even a sense of tragedy, intellectuals at the turn of the millennium by and large accepted a present that brooked no alternatives. Benjamin Barber’s famous essay about the forthcoming battle between the forces of McWorld (liberal globalism) and jihad (the tribal reaction of identity and community) entertained the possibility that “Jihad may be a last deep sigh before the eternal yawn of McWorld.”⁴⁶ Francois Furet lamented: “Here we are, condemned to live in the world as it is.”⁴⁷ The active quest for salvation in this world was no longer imaginable; the potential for redemptive political transformation had faded forever into the mist of history. Zygmunt Bauman complained that we were all living in a shameful “postideological” and “postutopian” age, with no grand designs except for the relentless pursuit of individual self-interest and happiness.⁴⁸ The struggle for another world was a ghostly remnant of a dead idealism, to be recalled with regret, but impossible to revive in a world “cold and

grey” in which “a light has gone out.”⁴⁹

THE RETURN OF THE STRUGGLE FOR THE FUTURE

While the end of the twentieth century was marked by a resigned acceptance of the demystification of the world and the predominance of instrumental rationality, the beginning of the millennium brought with it the unexpected “counterhegemonic” irruptions we mentioned earlier in our introduction. As a result, studies on “resistance to globalization” greatly increased. However, the bland term *resistance* does not adequately reflect the fiery hopes of movements that wish to totally overturn what they see as an illegitimate neoliberal order. For them, the defining struggle of our era is between liberal-capitalist “globalism” and its “ideological challengers.”⁵⁰ The fate of the twenty-first century—and of humanity—will be sealed by the “clash between a singular market civilization . . . versus the possibility of a diversity of civilizations.”⁵¹ The world itself has become both the stage and frame of reference for groups challenging the status quo, as a “global imaginary”⁵² becomes predominant, linking oppositional forces everywhere.

Within this new global consciousness, the old paradigm of social class has increasingly been replaced by categories such as “humanity” and “future generations,” while class warfare has been subsumed by demands for identity and respect.⁵³ Furthermore, the ultimate goal of many of these movements is not restricted to achieving the emancipation of a territory, a people or a particular group—though such objectives often serve as the starting points for action. Instead, “the extent of the hope for community-of-the-liberated” has been expanded to include all of humanity.⁵⁴ As we shall see, this also holds for “right-wing,” “left-wing” and “no-wing” antiglobalists. Consequently, there has been an increased focus on achieving solidarity among movements and transnational actors around the globe, all seeking the linked goals of liberty and respect. The current internationalization of resistance is not a wholly new phenomenon. Abolitionism and female suffrage had already developed international moral networks in the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ However, as noted by Charles Tilly, “the international construction of ‘We’ became an increasingly familiar feature of twenty-first century social movements.”⁵⁶

A variety of theories have emerged to explain the rise of worldwide resistance to the capitalist global order and its future implications. Many authors have resurrected Karl Polanyi’s thesis that an unregulated market economy necessarily creates instability, the erosion of safety nets and communal bonds, which in turn inspires countermovements to reestablish community, belonging, and a sense of security.⁵⁷ World-systems theorists, focusing on the long term, understand the present antagonism to globalization as an example of a recurring pattern of resistance that is typical of periods of imperial collapse.⁵⁸ In a more heterodox fashion, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have argued for the existence of a new global revolutionary force—the “living thing” they call the “Multitude”—that transcends nation-states, ethnicities, and races. To them, this radical and shapeless force has created counterempire engaged in a war of liberation that will end in “authentic social peace” and the arrival of a radically transformed world.⁵⁹

Much of this new literature, though accepting the multifaceted nature of resistance to globalization,⁶⁰ stresses fundamental underlying commonalities between rebellious groups who believe “another world is possible.”⁶¹ We will return to some of these perspectives in our conclusion. However, in our view, this research, useful as it is, has not yet achieved a comprehensive understanding of the *nature* of the present-day opposition to globalization. This is because the spiritually grounded and emotionally compelling redemptive aspect of resistance has been

understudied and underestimated. Instead, the focus has overwhelmingly been on abstract and often mechanistic models that stress strategies of contention, mobilization, and activism or on the differences between leftist “global justice” alter-globalism and “rightist” nationalist antiglobalism, while ignoring other “no-wing” transformative movements. Utopian impulses, conceptions of society and humankind, theories of emancipation and salvation, and the values, feelings, and experiences that motivate activists to struggle and suffer for their beliefs have tended to pass unnoticed.⁶² As a result, one study concludes: “There can be no new grand strategy or grand narrative across such a diversity of struggles.”⁶³ While we acknowledge that strategies differ, we argue that there is indeed a *grand narrative* based on a “common ethical core and a common mental map”⁶⁴ that has arisen in response to globalization. Theodor Adorno, in one of his final aphorisms, stated that in the face of despair the only available option “is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption.”⁶⁵ This redemptive narrative is clearly voiced from within the varied movements we consider in the following pages.

A disinclination to address parallels in the way these movements understand and pursue their millennial goals is related to another significant absence in mainstream analysis of global resistance to the global order. With a few exceptions,⁶⁶ there has been a noticeable reluctance to include jihadi nationalist groups, violent groups, “new new religions,” or ecstatic movements under the umbrella of resistance to globalization. Rather, there has been a tendency, as noted by Ronaldo Munck, to distinguish between “good and bad social movements” or “serious” and “less serious” groups and to exclude discussion of the “bad” ones for fear of tainting the others.⁶⁷ As we will show throughout the book, despite many apparent differences, there are nonetheless striking similarities in the discourses, beliefs, and motives of groups, whether “good” or “bad,” “global” or “nationalist,” “alter” or “anti,” “serious” or “frivolous,” “left” or “right,” which see themselves engaged in an all-out struggle to liberate humanity from its chains and bring about the dawning of a new era.

THE LATIN AMERICAN QUEST FOR INDEPENDENCE

*The looking-glass school teaches us to suffer reality, not change it; to forget the past, not learn from it; to accept the future, not invent it . . . Yet perhaps—who can say—there can be no disgrace without grace, no sign without countersign, and no school that does not beget its counterschool.*¹

—**Eduardo Galeano**

*The messianic millennium will never come. Man is born only to depart. Nevertheless, man cannot live without the creed that the new journey is the final journey.*²

—**José Carlos Mariátegui**

ZAPATISTAS!

The War against Globalization

The story has by now become famous. In the mountains of the Mexican southeast, in the state of Chiapas, at the dawn of the first day of 1994, on the very same day as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented, a movement calling itself the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation; EZLN),³ emerged from obscurity to demand political and economic democracy for marginalized, impoverished, and disenfranchised local people, mostly of Indian descent.⁴ The spokesman for the Zapatista movement was “Subcomandante Marcos,” who hid his former identity as a university professor of philosophy behind his pseudonym and his black mask. While the Mexican government at first dismissed the Zapatistas as one more attempt by a leftist guerrilla group to seize power by force, it soon became clear that the rhetoric of the movement was not aimed merely at a local or even a national audience. In one of the group’s first communiqués, addressed to “the people and governments of the world,” the EZLN declared that it sought “liberty, justice, and democracy” because “in our dreams we have seen another world, an honest world, a world decidedly more fair than the one in which we live now.”⁵

Subcomandante Marcos garnered global support for the Zapatistas by portraying their struggle for economic and political justice as the forerunner of a titanic battle for the soul of humanity against implacable and overwhelming global forces of repression. Thus, Marcos greeted the thousands of people who came to Chiapas from all over the world to attend “Encounters for Humanity and against

Neoliberalism” with the words: “Welcome to this territory in struggle for humanity.”⁶

The Zapatistas frame rebellion in the context of an ongoing “Fourth World War,” which began after the end of the Cold War.⁷ Marcos paints a powerful picture of this apocalyptic struggle:

We Zapatistas say that neoliberal globalization is a war of conquest of the entire world, a world war, a war being waged by capitalism for global domination. Sometimes that conquest is by armies who invade a country and conquer it by force. But sometimes it is the economy. In other words, the big capitalists put their money into another country or they lend it money, but on the condition that they do what they are told to do. And they also insert their ideas in tandem with the capitalist culture, which is the culture of merchandise, of profits, of the market . . . Then neoliberal globalization, capitalism, destroys what exists in these countries; it destroys their culture, their language, their economic system, and it also destroys the ways in which those who live in that country relate to each other. So everything that makes a country a country is left destroyed.⁸

Therefore, when the Mexican government accused the Zapatistas of seeking to annihilate the Mexican state, the Zapatistas responded that the state had already totally compromised itself by succumbing to the blandishments of capitalism. Only the Zapatista movement could provide the last line of defense against the neoliberal attack against the Mexican nation and its authentic indigenous culture.

For the Zapatistas, the “international war, of Money versus Humanity, [is] carried out by a handful of financial centers, without homeland and without shame.”⁹ But even though the global conspiracy is rootless and shameless, it is not without character. The villain responsible for the international expansion of money and market is the United States. As Marcos writes, “The dignity of indigenous history of the countries of the American continent, the brilliance of European civilization, the historical wisdom of Asian nations, and the powerful and rich antiquity of Africa and Oceania, are attacked by the North American way of life.” According to his argument, the ultimate aim of the “total war” waged by the neoliberal world state is to bring all nations into conformity with the “North American capitalist model.”¹⁰ Mexico’s cosmopolitan and deracinated elite classes have capitulated to the neoliberal agenda of radical homogenization; they have become members of the new global class of “nonpoliticians . . . produced in the centers of ‘high’ technocratic education (Oxford, Harvard, Yale, Coca Cola?)” and then “exported” to all countries.¹¹ Revolutionary action must necessarily begin by “recovering the concept of nation and homeland.”¹²

Recovery requires wresting control over language away from the neoliberal elites and their minions who have instituted a new mode of speech that gives legitimacy to their conquest of the world.¹³ According to the Zapatistas, these elites call the destruction of local culture “modernity” while the thievery of local resources is “civilization”; the imposition of homogenizing and inhuman foreign values is called “democracy” and alienation is “progress.”¹⁴ The delusory neoliberal discourse obscuring human suffering is likened by Marcos to his own mask, which he has promised to remove when his country is freed from the oppression “imposed upon it by ‘modernity.’”¹⁵ All those who, like the Zapatistas, have “failed modernity”¹⁶ are brothers and sisters in the struggle. They must unite to save a world cut adrift from its spiritual moorings by the inhuman project of neoliberalism. The ultimate goal is not a return to an idyllic past but to “build an alternative modernity” devoted to

“reason, justice, equality, liberty, and, above all, fraternity.”¹⁷

As is the case with the other antiglobalization discourses we shall investigate, the Zapatista narrative combines high spiritual content with a strongly polarizing intent. Capitalism, Marcos proclaims, “turns everything into merchandise” by commodifying and devaluing human life, emptying it of all content.¹⁸ “In the financial market millions of human beings of all races and colors are always worth less and less, as the devalued currency of their blood turns a profit.”¹⁹ “Instead of humanity . . . [neoliberalism] offers us stock market value indexes.... instead of dignity . . . [it] offers us globalization of misery, [and] instead of hope . . . offers us emptiness.”²⁰ Globalization, Marcos laments, “destroys nation-states. . . . and not just that. It destroys the human beings in them. The only thing that matters is the law of the market.”²¹ As a result of the expansion of the instrumentality of the global marketplace, real people, with all their hopes and dreams, will cease to exist. In their place, “there are only buyers and sellers.”²² The pretensions of the developed world are a fraud, and a favorite Zapatista chant is, “First World? Ha Ha Ha!”²³ The Zapatistas call on all the oppressed of the world to resist the spiritual erosion caused by globalized materialism or risk losing not only their identities but also their very humanity.

Paradoxically, just as globalization erases national and local distinctions, so does resistance to globalization disintegrate differences; but it does so in a positive and empowering manner. Though different in surface aspects, under the skin all rebels against globalism are fundamentally the same as the Mexicans of Chiapas. As Marcos wrote: “Here and there, neoliberalism destroys nations in order to own them . . . There and here, neoliberalism offers us only dejection.” As a consequence, “We’ll no longer speak of ‘here’ and ‘there.’ ” . . . “For this reason, this ocean no longer separates us or makes us different . . . Because the war they impose on us makes us *compañeros* and *compañeras*.”²⁴ The brotherhood of resistance transcends nations, languages, cultures, races, or genders. The new global collective is “united by dissatisfaction, rebellion, the desire to do something, by nonconformity.”²⁵ The Zapatista movement is a “spark in the Mexican mountains, in which all rebels of the world recognize themselves, even without being indigenous.” It is “like a mirror that helps us to know ourselves and say: We exist.”²⁶ As a Zapatista National Liberation Front member asserts: “If the system does not allow you to live as a human being, there is nothing left but to struggle, to rebel, and to show that you have alternatives to its world. Otherwise you rot, you become a zero, a zero in history.”²⁷

This encompassing but ambivalent attitude—simultaneously supporting and occluding local distinction—is the ideological root of the Zapatistas’ commitment to the establishment of a global network of resistance supporting all linked causes in what has been called a “new internationalism . . . based on a sense of interconnectivity, mutual dependence, and identification among struggles against neoliberalism and for other possible worlds that nonetheless maintain their autonomous character.”²⁸ As members of the “globalization of resistance” movement proclaim, the Zapatistas “rebel yell: ‘Ya Basta!’ (Enough!) announced the end of the end of history. . . . The Zapatistas translated struggle into a language that the world can feel, and invited us all to read ourselves into the story, not as supporters but as participants.”²⁹

From its inception, the instantaneous international medium of the Internet served as an appropriate vehicle as well as a metaphor for the horizontal, homogenizing, and encompassing Zapatista message, strengthening its global base of support while at the same time diffusing its particular local content. In this sense the Zapatistas are pioneer cyberspace guerrillas,³⁰ creating a “new electronic fabric of struggle

to carry their revolution throughout Mexico and around the world.”³¹ The Internet also allowed the movement to circumvent the global commercial media system, which they saw as “determined to present a virtual world, created in the image of what the globalization process requires.”³²

To spread the liberating word, the Zapatistas not only made use of the Internet, they also created their own media outlets, including the magazine *Rebeldia* and a Zapatista radio network called Radio Insurgente, which advertizes itself as “the voice of the voiceless.” Their alternative media focuses on the underreported or *hidden* news, on *forgotten* history. They proclaim “a life work, a political project and purpose: to let the truth be known.”³³ Independent videographers have been crucial as well in disseminating the Zapatistas’ struggle worldwide.³⁴ Marcos insists that the power of *true* words will break the taboos imposed by the powerful and will shatter the hegemonic discourse of the ruling elites. As he states, “Our word is our weapon.”³⁵ A communiqué from the Zapatista Army for National Liberation reinforces this point: “Silence is what the powerful offer our pain in order to make us small . . . the powerful use the word to impose an empire of silence. We use the word to renew ourselves . . . We raise the word and with it break the silence of our people.”³⁶

The Red Star of Humanity

According to the Zapatista ideology, the powerful forces of neoliberal globalization are inexorably and implacably arrayed against the “globalization of rebellion” that is arising among the indigenous people and all of the oppressed every where.³⁷ The recurring theme of the Zapatista leader is the struggle of the “powerful versus the people.” As Marcos says, in the “the world of money” and among “those who live in power and live for power . . . there is no space for hope, no place for tomorrow.”³⁸ The Zapatistas are the revolutionary vanguard inspiring mass resistance against the evil global capitalists who unjustly rule the world:

This is who we are . . . The red star calling out to humanity and the world to be heard, to be seen, to be named . . . behind our black masks . . . Behind us, we are you. Behind we are the same simple and ordinary men and women, who are found in all races, painted in all colors, speak in all languages, and live in all places. The same forgotten men and women. The same excluded, the same discriminated against, the same persecuted. We are you.³⁹

Or, as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation announced: “On one side is neoliberalism with all its repressive power and all its machinery of death. On the other side is the human being.”⁴⁰

As we have seen, the Zapatistas’ discourse defines the resistance in Mexico and everywhere else as an apocalyptic battle that must soon end in a final showdown between the forces of good and evil. As Marcos declared during the protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Cancún, Mexico, “This is not the first time that those of money have hidden behind high walls . . . the high command of money has come to Cancún to dominate the world in the only way it knows how—destroy it! The hotel zone is a symbol of the world they would construct—the only way we ever get in there is as servants and maids. Behind those walls, they are plotting out how to change death into money.”⁴¹ It is no surprise then that the Zapatistas define the resistance in Mexico and everywhere else as “the search for life and the struggle against death . . .”⁴²

This “search for life” in opposition to the artificial and soulless forces unleashed by capitalist globalization has many dimensions. Above all, the truly human being is profoundly connected to inner spiritual resources and genuinely rooted within a local cultural tradition. Authenticity is the most common value referred to and sought within the movement and is starkly contrasted to the homogenous and reduced humanity produced by neoliberal globalization. Peoples and cultures must not be faceless pawns at the mercy of the global market. Rather, all persons and all ways of being have their own intrinsic worth and identity and therefore deserve respect and recognition. As an inscription in a Zapatista community announced: “We have no gold, silver, diamonds, but we are millionaires, we have dignity.”⁴³ In Marcos’s words:

For Power, money carries weight; for the rebel, dignity carries weight . . . in its story Power constructs a virtual reality where dignity is unintelligible and not measurable.... (For them) dignity exists because money will buy it and convert it into merchandise that circulates according to the laws of the market . . . of Power. But, it turns out that the tale as told by Power is just that, a tale that disdains reality and, therefore, is a badly told tale. Dignity continues escaping from the laws of the market and begins to have weight and value in the place that matters, that is to say, in the heart.⁴⁴

The quest for dignity extends beyond Mexico. “Dignity is that nation without nationality . . . that rebel irreverence that mocks borders, customs, and wars.”⁴⁵ The twenty-fifth anniversary of the appearance of the Zapatistas was entitled a “Worldwide Festival of Dignified Rage.”⁴⁶

An important dimension of the quest for dignity is the Zapatista demand to replace representative democracy with a new “true” direct democracy in which the people *actually* govern themselves. The “purported democracy” in place now, Marcos says, is a technique to disguise the enslavement of the people. The Zapatista concept of democracy, in Marcos’s mind, is “much more radical” than the “Western” one.⁴⁷ As in other antiglobalizing, anticapitalist movements, the equalizing call is for the political elite “to govern by obeying [the people].”⁴⁸ Consequently, the Zapatistas defend mechanisms of direct popular consultation; for example, they held a nationwide referendum in 1999 for the “Meeting for the Recognition of the Rights of the Indian People and for the End of the War of Extermination.”⁴⁹ Moreover, they have established new forms of direct democracy in their own communities and villages in the state of Chiapas, including the creation of Autonomous Municipalities and Good Government Juntas. To “resist neoliberal homogenization”⁵⁰ these communities have inaugurated autonomous schools in which locally chosen young Zapatistas (the average age is twenty) replace the government-appointed teachers.⁵¹ The successful self-governance of these Zapatista communities, in Marcos’s view, is a “model for a new world”⁵² that is waiting to be born: “We understand that we must construct a society in which those who rule do so through the will of the people.” Marcos adds, “There is no other path.”⁵³

Obviously, the idealized bottom-up political system requires high levels of participation by local communities, who are obliged to originate plans, programs and initiatives for themselves—a time-consuming public process that must inevitably draw them away from their own households and personal interests. How this commitment will actually take place is still not clear, and some critics have warned against taking a romantic view of the self-governing potential of the Zapatista communities.⁵⁴ Another difficult issue is the tension between Marcos’s own larger-than-life persona

and his vigorous opposition to the imposition of the authority of “self-enlightened vanguards” on the people. Marcos himself has vehemently “renounced the role of vanguards; to obligate anyone to accept our way of thinking over any other argument wouldn’t be reasonable.” He concluded by saying, “I shit on all the revolutionary vanguards of this planet.”⁵⁵ Yet, Marcos has been unable or unwilling to halt the spread of myths around his person and the development of charismatic dynamics within the Zapatista movement, where his writings are studied as gospel.⁵⁶ As a result, some former supporters have attacked him for his narcissism and theatrics, which are seen as detrimental to the movement’s left-wing legitimacy.⁵⁷

Restoring Memory and Joy

Like other aurora movements seeking to inspire voluntary participation, the Zapatistas strive to recapture, preserve, and appropriate collective memory and revitalize forgotten collective practices. They argue that the identity of Mexican indigenous communities has been under siege since the first European colonizers arrived. “In 515 years they have not managed to destroy us, and now it’s even less likely, when we are joined together against a common enemy.”⁵⁸ Mexican Indians are “united by our shared misery, by the collective oblivion into which we were cast 501 years ago.”⁵⁹ In this way the Zapatistas stress the historical continuity between their current struggle and the struggles of their ancestors, who are imagined as belonging to loving utopian collectives where people fought as one against oppression. At a rally with indigenous supporters Marcos declared,

Yesterday they “civilized” us, and today they want to “modernize” us. . . . They tell us that their world is better, that we need to leave our land, our home, our history; that we need to go to their lands and live there; that we need to live in their houses and serve them; that we must be part of their history and die in their history.⁶⁰

According to one of the EZLN communiqués: “We continue to resist because our grandparents resisted more than 500 years of contempt, humiliation and exploitation.”⁶¹ Resisting a “capitalist modernity” devoted to progress and contemptuous of history, the Zapatistas put great emphasis on respecting the sacred authority of the elderly and the wise “ancestors” who, as one Zapatista rebel declared, “taught us that a people with pride is a people that does not surrender, that resists, that has dignity.”⁶² To achieve the desired communion with the past, the Zapatistas frequently invoke the *Popol Vuh*, the Mayan sacred book that depicts the deeds and glories of the Mayan Gods since the dawn of creation.⁶³ As Marcos puts it: “We, the indigenous, are the guardians of history. In our memory we guard all colors, all routes, all words, and all silences. We live so that memory might live and, living, not be lost.”⁶⁴

To strengthen their identity as the descendents of the first peoples of the continent, the Zapatistas have adopted Mayan symbols such as the *caracol*, a conch shell, recalling the horn that the ancient Mayans used to rally the community. The term *caracol* also designates each autonomous region in rebel Zapatista territory. Images of the Zapatista’s *caracol* of resistance, as well as such icons as pyramids (alluding to the pyramids of the ancient Mayas), have become prominent in murals and textiles in Zapatista villages.⁶⁵

The Zapatistas also draw strength from the story of their namesake, Emiliano Zapata. “From the

first hour in this long night of our death,” Marcos said, “our most distant grandfathers say there was someone who gathered up our pain and our oblivion.”⁶⁶ Marcos has continually stressed need to “rescue Zapata” from the museums and put his living example back in the streets and fields of Mexico.⁶⁷ Zapata is also conflated with the indigenous (Tzeltal) mythical figure of Votán, creating a new redeeming myth for the Mexican Indians:

In us, in our arms, in our covered faces, in our true words, Zapata united the wisdom and the struggle of our most ancient ancestors. Joined with Votán, the Guardian and Heart of the People, Zapata rose up again to struggle for democracy, liberty, and justice for all Mexicans. Although he has Indian blood, Votán-Zapata does not struggle only for the indigenous, he also struggles for those who are not indigenous but who live in the same misery.⁶⁸

The Zapatistas thus become the medium through which the sacred mission of Votán-Zapata will be accomplished.

The symbolism was maintained when the Zapatistas named the site of their first national convention the Aguascalientes, after the location of the constitutional convention convened by Zapata and other revolutionary leaders in 1914. The autonomous communities in Zapatista territory were also initially named Aguascalientes. In 1994 the Zapatistas held a rally that included a large parade and dancing to commemorate the anniversary of the assassination of Zapata, and Marcos announced that “Our heart is happy because Emiliano Zapata has returned.”⁶⁹ The key role that Zapata plays in the EZLN symbolic world was further emphasized in 2001 by the three-week “march of indigenous dignity, the march of the color of Earth,” which paralleled the march of the peasant army of Zapata and Villa into Mexico City during the Revolution.⁷⁰ During the march, the rebels met members of Zapata’s family in his hometown of Anenecuilco, reaffirming their connection with his memory.⁷¹

Marches and rallies are also part of a general effort to celebrate important dates, announcements, and declarations.⁷² As is the case with other movements we will consider, when the community feels itself threatened by the destructive and dehumanizing forces of global capitalism, these effervescent communal festivals provide participants with a felt sense of spiritual richness and the sensual experience of fulfilling their destiny as “true” human beings. “Seen from above, the world is very small, because it disregards people; and, in their place, there is a bank account number,” said Marcos. But “seen from below, the world is so spacious that there is room for joy, music, song, dance, dignified work.”⁷³ Through the organization of dances, folk and rock concerts, poetry sessions, and sports tournaments, the Zapatistas ritualize joy and make it part of their movement. For example, the announcement by Marcos of the creation of Good Government Councils was part of a three-day collective party in which the Zapatistas celebrated “the joy of staying alive and being a rebel.”⁷⁴ These moments of *alegría* give the movement an exciting carnival-like atmosphere⁷⁵ and provide vivid, embodied expressions of an alternative to the cold, inhuman, and technocratic global order. As much as anything, such celebrations are crucial in inspiring commitment and participation among the followers.

On the day of the eleventh anniversary of the EZLN, amid a public celebration in the highlands of Chiapas, the Zapatistas released a communiqué that reaffirmed the fundamental goals of the group: “The Zapatista plan has been always the same: to change the world, make it more just, more free,

more democratic, that is, more human.”⁷⁶ The plan is based on a holistic conception of politics as a tool for universal human renewal. In the opening ceremony of the Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, Marcos proclaimed the “beginning here in the mountains of the Mexican southeast of the construction of a new and good world .”⁷⁷ “We’ll build another world,” Marcos pledged on another occasion, “a better one, bigger, better, one in which all worlds can fit.”⁷⁸ Of course, the arrival of the new era will require sacrifice and martyrdom : “We, Zapatistas, put a high price on our lives. They are worth a better world, nothing less.”⁷⁹ In support of this great global transformation, the Zapatistas firmly reject any notion of the *inevitability* of global domination by capitalism as disseminated by powerful elites who convert “today” into a new religious creed, which fosters submission, apathy, and hopelessness among the masses. From the Zapatista standpoint, the notion that the current world is “the only one possible” and the inevitable “culmination of the ages”⁸⁰ is the biggest lie of our times. Rather, on top of the ruins of a world “withered by the powerful” another world is rising.⁸¹ And even though global capitalism might seem momentarily triumphant, its decay is already evident. “If something new is born,” observed Marcos, “it is because something old is dying.”⁸²

Following these premises, the anticipation of *tomorrow* has become the driving force of the Zapatistas’ critique of the current (neoliberal) state of the world. Marcos frequently defines the role of the Zapatistas as pioneers, the first ones, those who “plant the tree of tomorrow.” As Marcos says: “The tree of tomorrow is a space where everyone is, where the other knows and respects all others, and where the false light loses its last battle. If you press me to be precise, I would tell you it is a place with democracy, liberty, and justice: that is the tree of tomorrow.”⁸³

The utopian alternative world envisioned by the Zapatistas⁸⁴ is hailed as a pure and potent creation of the human imagination, built on the premise “that the monuments that neoliberalism erects for itself are nothing but future ruins.”⁸⁵ The certainty that “tomorrow” will come and that good must inevitably prevail over bad runs throughout the Zapatista narrative. “If today we are on the defensive it is because evil still rules during the daylight,” Marcos declared in a speech, “but a time will come when we will find evil and will expel it.”⁸⁶

It should be clear by now that, though profoundly invested in the defense of their homeland (both their own native soil of Chiapas and Mexico in general), the Zapatistas have from the outset characterized their struggle as part of a wider struggle “for humanity” against global capitalism; a struggle of marginalized, deracinated, and colonized peoples, cultures, and nations worldwide.⁸⁷ In the Zapatista worldview, Chiapas is first and foremost a living symbol of rebellion that will demolish the “new religion”⁸⁸ of neoliberalism; it is the harbinger of a humane global revolution that will inevitably overthrow today’s globalization of greed. For them, the words of the Mayan *Popol Vuh* ring profoundly true: “We have no names . . . We’re just orphans, we have nothing to call our own, young man. We’re just making our way among the mountains, small and great . . . And there’s one great mountain we saw that’s just growing right along. It’s rising really high! It’s just swelling up, rising above all the other mountains.”⁸⁹ The Zapatistas’ dream is to inspire all those who have nothing, who are oppressed, who are marginalized, to dare to climb that distant mountain.

THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION

The Resurgence of the Heroic Masses

On February 4, 1992, officers of the Venezuelan army led a failed military coup against the unpopular government of President Carlos Andrés Pérez. Called on by officials to put an end to the rebellion and prevent further bloodshed, Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez Frías, one of the leaders of the unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the government, made a live television appearance in which he asked his comrades to surrender their arms. The thirty-eight-year-old Chávez said that “unfortunately *por ahora* [for now]” the mission could not be accomplished. Further, he took “full responsibility for this Bolivarian military movement.”⁹⁰ This media event familiarized millions of Venezuelans with the young military officer who, in the popular mind, became instantly associated with an image of resistance, heroism, and dignity.

Although the insurrectionary path to power did not yield immediate results, the electoral path did. In December 1998, after spending most of the postcoup years crisscrossing the nation garnering local support, the former rebel was elected president of Venezuela and was later reelected twice, in 2000 and 2006, both times under the aegis of the new Fifth Republic of the country. Gradually, throughout his presidency, Hugo Chávez emerged as the founder and guide of what came to be known as the “Bolivarian Revolution,” aimed both at prying the country from the claws of U.S.-driven imperialism and at offering Latin America and the world a new model of democracy and society for the twenty-first century. This model, as we shall see, has much in common with those provided by other antiglobalization or alter-globalization movements elsewhere.

The image of rebirth has been a symbolic centerpiece of the Chávez presidency from its early stages, as Chávez has proclaimed himself the new leader of a revolution originally initiated by the “liberator” Simón Bolívar. In Chávez’s view, the grand enterprise of the Bolivarian Revolution can be carried forward only by the poor and oppressed who have been subjugated for decades by the corrupt and greedy elites beholden to capitalist-imperialist foreign interests. These elites are the enemies of the authentic nation constituted by the impoverished and downtrodden masses. They are the “heroic people of Simón Bolívar”⁹¹ who now, under the inspiring leadership of Chávez, have been “resuscitated from the ashes and are driving a revolutionary process”⁹² that will fulfill their historical mission of liberating Venezuela, then Latin America, and ultimately the world. The verbal and symbolic discourse of the Bolivarian leader is based on a narrative of suffering and redemption similar to that of the Zapatistas. As he says, during the oligarchy that lasted throughout the Fourth Republic (1958 to 1999), “Venezuela fell into a sort of collective tomb” because “[there was] a collective surrender” by the people. With the rise of the Bolivarian Revolution, this sorrowful past has been redeemed. At that moment, “the people recaptured a dream, a pathway that had been lost for decades, long and gloomy decades.”⁹³

The rhetoric of a long-delayed “people’s liberation” weighed heavily in the discussion and subsequent approval by referendum of a new constitution for the country in 1999. That year, the charter favored by Chávez superseded the “oligarchic” Fourth Republic with a “popular” Fifth Republic that aimed to recapture the original fervor of Bolívar’s movement. At this time, the country was renamed the “Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.” The new populist national liberation project was portrayed in stark opposition to the “neoliberal dogma” promulgated by the West, which, Chávez said, erases everything that “gives strength to a nation.” The Bolivarian state must be autochthonous and authentically Venezuelan and must strenuously resist the corrupt “foreign models” inspired by neoliberalism. As he argued, “the market cannot create republics because it is grounded on the dogm of individualism that led to a worldwide state of affairs in which we are savages, fighting against each other.”⁹⁴

In Chávez's view, the liberation of the oppressed masses demands a constitution based on authenticity. This will provide the people with a strong sense of community and belonging, while also offering them a genuine means to express themselves within the national collective. Chávez declared that the new constitution was an expression of a "Bolivarian ideology" that embodied the specific characteristics and yearnings of the Venezuelan people. It was, he said, in radical contrast to the postmodern American proclamation of the "end of ideologies," which imagined humanity on the pathway to a "technocratic and robotic era, where ideas cease to exist."⁹⁵

According to Chávez, the Fifth Republic marks the transformative rejuvenation of Venezuela. But this rebirth was announced and prepared for by specific historical events that are constantly on Chávez's lips. The first occurred in the late 1980s and took the form of popular riots (known as *Caracazo*) that exploded into a full-blown rebellion. More than a thousand people were killed in this uprising, most of them from the shantytowns on the hills surrounding Caracas. "The Caracazo," Chávez stated, "was the bell that started this revolution."⁹⁶ The second episode was the failed coup of February 4, 1992, that initiated his rise to power. Chávez calls this event "lightning that cleared a way."⁹⁷ As he has proclaimed: "The twenty-first century in Venezuela began on February 4, 1992—v advanced history."⁹⁸ Chávez locates both the *Caracazo* and the 1992 coup as the beginning of a *sacred narrative* that inexorably leads to the Bolivarian Revolution of the turn of the millennium. Both moments are interpreted not only as signs that anticipated the future but also as *essential aspects* of an inevitable cataclysmic struggle to achieve the millennial goals of the revolution. Addressing his supporters in the Venezuelan capital, Chávez triumphantly proclaimed that "the neoliberal paradigm (has been) . . . smashed in a thousand pieces by the people" who "began to break it in 1989, in the Caracazo, and in 1992, on February 4."⁹⁹

For Chávez and his followers, the revolt of the people of Venezuela occurred under the symbolic guidance of a pantheon of historical figures. As already mentioned, paramount among these icons is Simón Bolívar, who led the liberation struggle of several Latin America countries against colonial domination. Within this mythical narrative, Bolívar is portrayed not only as the ancestral patron saint of the movement but also as a living spirit and active guide for revolutionary activism. This has led to the criticism that under Chávez the cult of Bolívar is truly "out of control."¹⁰⁰ To mark the tenth anniversary of his presidency, Chávez returned to the tomb of the "liberator" and announced: "Ten years ago, Bolívar—embodied in the will of the people—came back to life."¹⁰¹ Chávez identifies himself very closely with the potent Bolivarian presence, filling his speeches with verbatim passages from the great leader's writings and speeches while also comparing his own actions with episodes from Bolívar's life or legends about him. For example, he often quotes the "Chant to Bolívar" written by the Chilean writer Pablo Neruda, which announced that the Liberator returns "every 100 years, when the people awaken."¹⁰² The implication, obviously, is that Chávez is the modern reincarnation of Bolívar, inspiring the dormant people to achieve their destiny. Within this richly evocative symbolic framework, every meaningful new episode of the Bolivarian Revolution is portrayed as a continuation of incidents from the revolutionary past. No wonder then that Chávez and his followers often chant: "Look out, look out, Bolívar's sword is passing through Latin America."¹⁰³

Chávez and his disciples also often invoke the writings and teachings of a friend and mentor of Bolívar: Simón Rodríguez, who is hailed as the "Socrates of America."¹⁰⁴ Rodríguez—who also used the pseudonym Samuel Robinson—insisted on the importance of *originality* in Latin American politics and argued that Latin America should construct institutions and a framework of government based on principles uniquely intrinsic to the region. A standard trope in Chávez's speeches is taken

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