

The Opposition of Power/ The Power of the Opposition

Zeynep Gambetti

In a series of conferences titled “Dialogues Between Civilizations,” which took place in Istanbul in the beginning of June, an academician from the USA sprang up from his seat and uttered a sentence beginning with, “Six members of my family have been massacred in the Holocaust.” This sentence became his excuse for declaring illegitimate everything that had been and could have been said about him. In this way, he justified his absence from a panel on the apology campaign to Armenians. He was able to say that the relationship between Turks and Armenians did not concern him; and he condemned those who condemned him. In short, he transformed victimization into a tool of power.

In the same conference, again an academician from the USA who found the label liberal democrat suitable for himself resorted to the argument of freedom of conscience for justifying his country’s invasion of Iraq. The issue at stake was rethinking laicism and secularism. However, let alone questioning laicism, the discussion evolved towards its unconditional vindication. The argument on the legitimacy of resorting to bans, force, and even war if the need arises in the struggle against fundamentalism was brought up, whereas the intention of the panel was to be able to debate that laicism did not have a single definition and that Islam as well was open to different forms of laicism-secularism. Leaving aside the correctness or incorrectness of the chain of logic that derived from the freedom of conscience the right to invade Iraq, there was something that this argument *actually* did. It dissolved the effect of the listening and understanding practices that the academicians from the USA, Italy, Turkey, Iran, and Egypt had fortuitously formed in the first few days of the conference. The closeness that had been built up even among those who were not of the same opinion came to an end; different sides were created; individuals were confined into various representations. Advocates began to applaud each other. The stake was no longer to persuade; what mattered was to overwhelm.

The subject of this paper is this very dialectic I have witnessed in the recent past and which preoccupied me a lot. A liberal democrat who *in effect* violates the principles of plurality, rationalism, and common good which he defends in discourse; a victimized member of a minority who turns this into an excuse for not laying claim to the sorrows of another minority – these very states of inversion, these instances of the most innocent discourses peculiarly turning into their opposites, their potential to create counter-effects ... these are the invisible faces of a very insidious violence. Yet even those sharp eyes which can detect the disparities between what one says and what one does may not see what they are doing as they say something or by saying something. This violence, which especially became apparent last year in Turkey during the Marxism and Ergenekon discussions, revealed that a very masculine sovereign reflex was a trap that even those who defend liberty fell into. I am afraid that to claim we are struggling with power is nothing other than self-delusion as long as this violence is not disclosed, deciphered and thought over. This is why, in this paper, I claim that in Turkey the questioning that will pave the way for freedom should begin from here. As a woman who dares to say a word in this male sphere, I claim that no matter whether we support the Ergenekon operation or we perceive it as a battle of elephants, whether we are leftists or we label ourselves as liberal democrats, none of us can be either a democrat or a freedom fighter unless we question the ambition for power in our minds and in our language.

I suppose that the problem begins with the perception of words as “merely words.” In the dualist ideational system, which, according to the dominant history of Western philosophy initiated by Plato, who mercilessly campaigned against the sophists, the true function of words is to refer to the *Idea* which constitutes the essence of a thing. Although Plato was aware of the pedagogic importance of rhetoric, he did not philosophize over it. On the contrary, he reduced speech to an instrument. This understanding, which constitutes the backbone of Western metaphysics since Plato, is in eternal ease with the assumption that words are/do *nothing* other than description and communication. It is thought that discussing an idea would have no consequences for the reality that is referred to by that idea since reality exists outside speech. Likewise, the culture of debate, that is, the ground on which liberal democracy rests, focuses on the content of

statements. It is not concerned with the phenomenon John Austin specifies in the title of his book *How to Do Things with Words*.¹

In fact, many things are done with words. Sophists were the first to understand this; however, later on, different currents, which for centuries remained marginal in Western philosophy for not being able to adjoin theology, rejected Plato's dualism, at times by following the path of the sophists and at times by departing from them. They did not give up arguing that speech is not only an instrument, but creates actual effect, which would later on be named as "speech acts."

To explain the term speech act with an example John Austin gives, there is no outer reality referred to in proposing marriage to someone. The ground of the marital relationship between two people is founded by words. As the phrase "bind with a word to wed" very well elucidates, in this situation the words do not refer to anything other than themselves. Or rather, the content of the utterance (the condition of being bounded with a word) is produced at the moment it is uttered. A speech act is performed independent of the desired effect of the utterance. For example, you can talk in a romantic tone or you can strike a humorous attitude as you propose marriage; but, in either case, the act of your speech is a "proposal." Of course, there are minimal conditions that make a proposal pass as a proposal – for example, a proposal that is not made to someone is not a proposal. However, from the moment these conditions are met, the desired effect does not have an impact on the act itself. We may talk of a good proposal, or a bad proposal, or a proposal that is expressed in a bad way; but, in the end, there is a proposal.² The act and the effect do not have to overlap. And maybe this is what renders the act invisible; the effect of a gentle utterance containing humanist words can conceal the acts of oppression and violence it performs.

There is no doubt that the space of power is constituted with discourse besides various material and institutional practices; and that discourse plays a significant role in the organization and classification of public space. It would be faulty to perceive power as a tool of oppression belonging to only specific actors. And neither opposition nor democracy is imminent to a single -ism or group. A drawback of the comfort that stems from thinking this way is being unable to resist the reproduction of power in domains that appear to be oppositional. It is assumed that the state of being victimized denotes purification from power. However, to conceive power as a state of being or an object that can be owned makes both the victims and the opposition partners in the establishment of power, since it conceals that power is a mode of relating that is constantly reproduced in practice and in discourse. Therefore, it is crucial to examine not only the content, but also the acts performed by words.

On non-Discussion

Since the Enlightenment, discussion has been attributed grand normative meanings in political life. Discussion is not only the alternative to conflict, but it also ensures that the principles which make collective life possible are situated on rational grounds. Both in Kant and in Mill, discussion and debate are the sole paths that lead to public good. In a plural community, the correction of one's mistake by another by means of discussion is the prerequisite of the formation of the common mind. In layman's terms, people communicate by talking. There is a strong belief that if the factors that prevent discussion are eliminated – for example, if freedom of expression, as well as freedom of thought and conscience is secured – then an agreement or a consensus that oversees common good will be attained. The power of this belief, which can be considered to be optimistic, is such that in politics the lawmaking institutions, such as the senate and the parliament, are designed as discussion forums. According to this understanding, the parliament, besides being a quantitative space in which different interests in the society are represented in terms of numbers of seats, has qualitative characters. It is assumed that through the expression

¹ John Austin, *How to do things with words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

² In fact, what Austin tries to explain is a bit more complicated. An utterance both refers to something (it signifies, fixates, and describes), and creates an effect (it effects psychologically, it repels or attracts), and it is an act (it creates a situation, it forms a relation). These three dimensions of speech cannot be separated from each other.

of different views common mind will be constructed in the parliament. The social segments and ideologies which get into contact with each other with no recourse to force or violence will go beyond their limited interests and attain the capacity to determine what is good for the whole society solely through discussion – that is, solely through speech.

Although I have absolute respect for this belief, I am convinced that unless we evaluate thoroughly the conditions that make it possible for discussion and debate to contribute to freedom and democracy, it is inevitable to witness totally contrary developments. This is a total paradox; that is, even a method, which appears to be the most democratic, the most rational, and the most reconciliatory, has the potential to give way to polarizations and divisions, and even beyond that, to generate new polarizations.

I think that Turkey constitutes a perfectly convenient starting point for understanding this paradox. The performative quality of speech and its relationship with power became very evident in the directions a discussion in 2008 that evolved around Marxism took. Our political life which has been quite active (and exciting) in the last few years was already occupying the media and the public opinion a great deal by means of generating a new discussion material every other day. A major part of the discussions that have been carried out since the Justice and Development (AKP) rose to power – in a sense of urgency that had not been matched even in the 15-year period of civil war that was waged in the Southeast – revolved around religion and laicism. However, later on, a second track was opened up in the framework of the Ergenekon operations. It was highly significant that the discussion, which determined what democracy is through a criterion of stance such as on which side a true democrat should stand, revolved around “true left” and “liberal left.”

In this paper, aware of the fact that as a point of view it is quite restricted to search for the problems in intellectual patterns, I will try to understand especially the latest rupture in the left through the practices of relatedness constituted by speech, rather than indulging in an analysis of mentalities like the intellectuals of this geography regularly do.

The shift in the ideological horizons of the “libertarian left” intellectuals, who gathered around the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP) and especially *Birikim* journal and *Radikal İki* newspaper, from class to identity politics, had already created a tension in the left. This group that was accused of defending bourgeoisie values, of being third way proponents, and of falling prey to the postmodern discourse of the post 1980, tended to justify itself through the concept of democracy. They thought, the Cold War left could not realize how downtrodden human rights in the Eastern Block were as they equated democracy with bourgeoisie dictatorship. And even when they realized the situation they could not criticize it for the sake of not betraying the cause. Those who criticized the libertarians had in the past buttered up Stalinist totalitarianism, and especially, they were short of seeing that the world had changed after 1980, that the phenomenon of class had changed, that the vanguard party tactic would no longer work, and that the oppression and exploitation relations excluded by class-based politics also carried an emancipatory potential.

The disparities within the left became even more apparent during the Ergenekon process and the closure case against AKP; new polemics emerged. To summarize it crudely, the apparent discussion exacerbated because a group of “intellectuals,” who came from the leftist tradition (those who had distanced themselves from this tradition as well as those who made sense of the world still from within the leftist imagination) perceived AKP not as a conservative, but rather as a progressive party, or at least a party that opens the way of Turkey; they made pro EU and/or anti-Kemalist contributions to the newspapers and meetings of various religious communities; and lastly, they supported the Ergenekon operation. A group of leftist intellectuals accused the other leftist groups (no doubt, they are of a great variety) of not siding with the AKP and the Ergenekon case and they declared themselves to be the only democrats. According to this formula, if you were not on the “right” side in the Ergenekon process, then you were not a democrat. In other words, “a radical break was being experienced between those who said ‘I am a leftist; therefore, I am a democrat’ and those who said ‘I am a democrat; therefore, I am a

leftist.”³ The “socialist left” in Turkey was being accused of being statist, nationalist, dogmatic, and of having a pro-coup mindset. One of those who expressed this in the most passionate way was Rasim Ozan Kütahyalı: The Turkish left “claimed that it had an International stance but could not even embrace the ethnic plurality in its own country,” it “has completely fallen to the miserable position which could be called ‘Ethnic Turkish left’ after the vulgar attitude it exhibited in the Ergenekon process.”⁴ There was “ideologically, no essential difference between the Turkish revolutionary/left and Pan-Turkist/right movements besides the color of their facades.”⁵ It was not acceptable to remain neutral, like *BirGün* newspaper, or to attach importance to Ergenekon but not to side with AKP.

On the other hand, all the other leftist groups (from the neo-nationalist to the revolutionary and the libertarian) had declared war against this group which they qualified as liberal leftist. For example, those who saw AKP – which is assumed to represent conservatism – as the only party that can meet the EU membership criteria, were labelled “deviationists”: “a deviation tendency, which relies on the Islamist movement, is being promoted among some of those who come from the former (traditionalist) leftist sections. They are being garnished and then put on the market especially by the big media empire that is in the hands of the new power loci; and through the confusion they create, they contribute greatly to the nullification of the left.”⁶ Likewise, “the Soros-ists or the Open Society guardsmen,” “the fair weather leftists who have not been to a single May 1 demonstration in their lives” who gather around “*Taraf*, the intelligence bulletin that is the gunman of the power, the ‘love boat’ of the artsy-liberals⁷ and the CIA agents”⁸ did not even feel the need to conceal their inconsistencies. The difference between the living-room socialists who thought that academic discussion was action itself and the leftist who came from the roots, was so huge that it was impossible to amend it.

In short, two different baskets, one with the label “orthodox left,” and the other with the label “liberal left” had been knit; and everyone was free to place people into one of these baskets as they wished. Nobody paused to think before being split into a thousand and one pieces. Nobody had considered the possibility of contracting one or the other of our habitual illnesses such as bearing resentment, the tendency to take things personally, labelling, and squabbling while the intention was to criticize the past of the left or the progressive groups in Turkey. The risk of reproducing the mistakes of the past just when we thought we had been purified of them had not made anybody hesitate. To be sure, the existence of a tendency to label in Turkey, which is not peculiar to the intellectuals, cannot be denied. Moreover, these kinds of reflexes are not the simple by-products of the official discourse which allows the world to be perceived only in black and white. Non-official discourses can express other, more complicated relationalities. For example, as the groups of belonging get smaller the chance of running into more nuanced labels rises (as in “the inhabitants of our village are very good but the men of the neighbouring village drink” or “those from Kayseri are very cunning in commerce”). In a spectrum that extends as far as calling Africans, who are the most distant to us and about whom we have the least knowledge, “cannibals”, these categories do not only draw the limits of identities but they also determine the right to speak. More precisely, every label contains cues hinting at how the speaker should be listened to. This is what lies at the background of the reflex to evaluate any claim according to the quality of the speaker rather than that of the spoken. According to this form of argument, which is called *ad hominem* in logic, speech does not have a being or a value independent of the speaker; its meaning changes according to the identity of the speaker. Of course, this is a logical error; however, formal logic is helpless in understanding the deeds of speech in all their intricacies.

However, the phenomenon I want to emphasize here is the state the Turkish left is in as we are about to close the first decade of the 21st century. What and how do leftist movements, which

³ Etyen Mahçupyan, Kuyere.com, 05.08.2008.

⁴ Kuyere.com, 29.08.2008.

⁵ *Taraf*, 27.05.2008.

⁶ Oğuzhan Müftüoğlu, *BirGün*, 10.08.2008.

⁷ The word in the original text is “*liboş*,” which is a derogatory term for “liberal.” e.n.

⁸ Mehmet Gürsan Şenalp, Sendika.org, 29.07.2008.

could never again recollect their social bases that had been dissipated by the 1980 coup, represent in a Turkey where its very army introduced free market regime and which has covered a longer distance in terms of being indexed to the market than many other developing countries, is a question mark. Maybe it was inevitable for these leftist groups who have been squeezed into a thought and literature universe with no material practices, who either did not understand or did not want to understand how much the reality referred to by the concept of “people” which they held in such high esteem in their discourse had changed in comparison to the pre-1980 period, to fall out with each other, as I will explicate at the end of the paper. Yet, what is ironic is that all these groups – who lay claim to opposition – were willing to decipher one another’s alliance with power and they have begun to oppose each other. On the other hand this discussion, which promisingly began as a discussion on Marxism, on the renewal of the left, and on being a democrat, drifted towards a binary codification because it developed around a criterion of stance in relation to power (that is, being with or against power).

On Opposing the Opposition

One of the convictions that Orthodox Marxism (paradoxically) shares with liberalism is that the world of thought and the world of action constitute separate planes of reality. The ground of this conviction is the “11. Thesis on Feuerbach.” According to a very superficial reading of this thesis, it is now time to make revolution, not philosophy. Whereas, if the first thesis, which is much more complicated and incomparably more profound, could have been read correctly it would not be overlooked that Marx’s objection to Feuerbach was an objection to vulgar materialism, that Marx was big enough a thinker not to take the easy way of acting before thinking, and, before anything else, he was not a man of action but a thinker. It is worth reminding the reader since it is relevant to this paper: In the first thesis, Marx articulates the dialectic between theory and practice, the objective and the subjective in a perfect way. According to him, materialism was incapable of conceiving the active, and subjective form of reality since it perceived reality as an object or a passive being which was meditated on. Idealism, on the other hand, focused solely on this, but, through abstraction. The uniqueness of the theory developed by Marx, who refuses to choose between these two, lies in the dialectic which is defined in the last sentence of the first thesis as “critical-practical activity” and which, I think, could not be apprehended very well by the revolutionary tradition. Instead of perceiving reality as an exteriority and detaching thought from it, this dialectic, which has been the source of inspiration of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, constructs thought as a material practice that produces effects, and practice as an order which shapes thought and subjectivity. In this way, it lays bare the power relations and the emancipation potentials that go unnoticed.

When viewed from this perspective, a discussion which is so dense in between the lines appears as a struggle for hegemony rather than an intellectual discussion. In this sense, it is in fact a practice of power. And this is what is insidious and invisible. A mode of relatedness which begins as criticism invokes another relationality as it turns into a practice of labelling and robbing the other of his legitimacy; it loses its quality as a gesture of thinking together, correcting, complementing, and expanding, and it evolves into a gesture of nullification. It creates antagonism rather than difference. Whereas difference could enable ideas to walk side by side without necessarily overlapping, a view in the form of antagonism blocks the way of the other.

It is not very hard to see that at best power would benefit from the antagonistic relation that two (or more) leftist groups engage in. Unfortunately, the best examples of the “divide and rule” formula can be found in the history of the left opposition. However, it is considered less remarkable that the very reflex of nullifying the positions other than one’s own is itself productive of a power. The belief that violence is in the monopoly of government evokes the feeling that those who remain outside the dominant ideology, ethnic group, gender, religion, and language are bestowed with a “self-sustained democratic identity.” However, the phenomenon which we can name as “the power of the opposition” surfaces at this point.

The power of the opposition is like the mirror of government. It reproduces the violence it criticizes and supposedly opposes. It is as exclusionary as power; it draws boundaries; it

stigmatizes those who do not share its worldview and deprives them of their legitimacy. It is a lawmaker and an imposer of bans just like the sovereign. Moreover, it mobilizes two exclusionary mechanisms as it designates its inside and outside. On the one hand, it struggles with the pressure groups which it designates as government, while, on the other hand, it attempts to struggle with others in opposing positions just like itself. Not only does it reproduce power in the structural sense, but it also *actively* plays into the hands of government since it weakens the opposition other than itself. Just at the point it assumes itself to be situated opposite power, it *actually* stands by its side. The *actual* effect it creates as it plays the most innocent, most victimized, most democratic, and most progressive is completely the reverse. It does not realize what kind of a model of relatedness it produces as it sharpens its ego by way of dragging other opposition through the mud. While attempting to defend democracy it *actually* crushes it, accusingly points its finger towards the other, plays the headmaster, cuts into others' words, does not listen. While intending to support power that will arise out of unity, it *actually* renders it completely impossible.

If you do not have any doubts about the moral superiority of your vision, then it is unlikely that you will be inclined to question your practices. To see oneself as hundred percent right, to mobilize one's defence mechanisms when faced with any kind of difference or criticism is an instinct peculiar to power; on the other hand, to develop the reflex of questioning oneself before anyone else does is the sine quo non of recovering from the sovereign reflex.

To make my point clearer and more concrete, let me state that by selecting one of the innumerable structural obstacles to the formation of a free and democratic society in Turkey (for example, Kemalism, neo-liberalism or conservatism) and underestimating all the others, that is, by favouring only one of the sides in the existing system, we would be supporting a form of power while struggling against another. Although it seems to be a politically correct strategy to play puss-in-the-corner in a space which has been conjecturally opened to tactics, it neither promises a long-lasting transformation for the coming period nor eliminates the domains of micro-power that arise out of our specific position. A "liberal democrat" who, for the sake of not playing into the hands of anti-democratic powers, refrains from criticizing AKP for its reluctance to solve the Kurdish problem until very recently, for pursuing neo-liberal policies at full speed, for silencing the legitimate demands of the workers with clubs and bashing on every May 1 and on every other occasion, for shelving the new Constitution process, for the reluctance it exhibits regarding the rights of Alewis and non-Muslims, for knowingly and willingly making the problems of the universities graver, actually defends a kind of instrumentality that can be phrased as "if you are going to make an omelette you do not ask the eggs how they feel."

Likewise, a "revolutionary leftist" who, for the sake of not playing into the hands of conservative powers, does not want to appreciate AKP for its relative success gathering different sections together, for its appearance as the sole democratic hope in the face of the frustration and disorganization of the democratic powers apart from itself, for creating the ground that can recover the concepts of Kemalism-republic-laicism from their dogmatism, for its courage to play puss-in-the-corner with the TSK, for its attempts to free from Kemalism's grasp the pious and the covered who have been excluded from public space until today, for its accidentally beneficial public utility services, is, in the formal sense, not a bit different from the above-mentioned liberal democrat. In his eyes too, there is no inconvenience in the sacrifice of some eggs today for the sake of the future.

Unless the means and ends overlap to a certain extent, it is almost impossible for the resulting outcome not to turn into a structure that conditions the actors. The words of a leftist who shouts at Trotskyists, "I am a democrat, you are social fascists" are not only words, but they are at the same time acts. A "liberal leftist" who pinpoints and bashes *BirGün* for not taking sides in Ergenekon simultaneously performs an act: he actually excludes *BirGün*, questions its legitimacy, and tries to deprive it of its right to speak in public space, its right to speak in the name of the left or democracy. When they attempt to judge the left of all times through criteria such as who is more democrat or who stands where in relation to Ergenekon, they end up chopping off the potential of generating an alternate meaning and solidarity that is expected of an oppositional

public space. Hence, let alone producing a collective power, they end up accumulating a load of animosity and wounds of honour grave enough to close off the already existing oppositional-alternative interaction space.

There is no third way other than these two mindsets. Their way of relating to the “Other” is the same. They suffer from the same instrumental logic, the same passion for sovereignty, and the same mental closure. Both mindsets determine their positions according to power. They are either on the side of or opposite to a locus of power. They succumb to one of their existing styles instead of conceiving many alternate grounds for politics such as the possibility that not power, but a force coming from below will establish democracy, that the establishment of democracy will call for the merging together of many different sections, and that, probably, the criterion of unity will not be the normative stance or the ideology people identify with, but rather, the ability of people to question the absoluteness of their position or cause. The actual effect of this is to create a vicious circle. Regardless of their success in the cause they give priority to, democracy keeps on being a state that is waited for in vain, like Godot, since they leave intact other sovereign reflexes.

Those that the table separates and those it unites

Besides being pathetic, the condition of filling in the ideal of fighting in the name of a cause with squabbling, has a lot to say about the present state of the social. The absence of struggle practices that are made in the materiality of everyday life makes the ego the main axis.

To explain it through a metaphor Hannah Arendt employs, the existence of a common concern/attention/interest among people is like being seated around a table. The table is a material reality that both unites and separates people. Arendt expresses the reality signified by the table with the term “*inter-est*.” This is a multi-layered play on words. On the one hand there is the literal meaning of “*interest*”. However, “*inter*” accounts for in-between-ness; “*est*,” on the other hand, is the conjugate of “*esse*,” that is, the verb “to be,” in Latin. When conceptualized in this way, “*inter-est*” connotes a concern that can be common to all rather than a personal-egoist interest. The table is the centre of attention, the common concern of those who sit around it. It represents a concreteness, a material interest that makes us partners. As long as we sit around it we are refrained from falling onto each other. For, the table stands in between us. The table is both the link and the rift, what makes us individuals. We all occupy a different place around the table and employ different perspectives. Because “you” and “I” occupy different places around the table we are not identical. “You” see the table and the ones around it from a specific angle; “I” see them from a different angle.

But what happens if the table between us suddenly disappears? Metaphorically, we are transformed into figures who are looking at each other but who do not have a materiality that will simultaneously both unite and separate them. Under these circumstances, “you” are my single focus of attention. My relation with “you” no longer goes through the mediation of the table; we encounter each other immediately. We do not have a concrete “interest” that will make us partners; we lack “inter-est.” The only relationship we will form in the absence of the materiality that will relate us to each other is between your personality and my personality. Our interests have become personal. From now on, we are each an ego.

I believe what I want to express with this metaphor is explicit enough. What keeps the ego in the background in the struggle for the change and transformation of concrete practices, what prevents it from turning against those who struggle in the name of the same thing, is “inter-est.” We are struggling for the same concrete goal even if we do not become the same. The diversity of the obstacles on our way is a factor that represses our egos, and constantly draws our attention to concrete practices. Our speech constructs a state of being potent bestowed by our common struggle rather than concretizing in acts that will produce a power effect on each other. In the absence of the practices that limit our egos the factors that prevent our positions from becoming absolute diminish. The state of not being able to become partners or unite that I have

mentioned above; that is, the expansion of the state of being the power of the opposition, I believe, is a sign of being disconnected from the roots and the concrete struggle.

At this point, it would be helpful to analyze the power-opposition dichotomy from another angle and to dwell on the Zapatista example.

From emancipation to freedom

Let us begin with the claustrophobic quality of the concept “resistance,” which –especially with the influence of Foucault– became a buzzword among university students in the recent years. According to this early-phase Foucaultian conceptualization, which contains a binary understanding of the social, resistance does not have the chance to destroy power. As the two generate and nourish each other, a successful resistance would construct a new power, and an unsuccessful power would turn into a resistance. In other words, the system is without an exit. The space of resistance is, in essence, determined by power since resistance is resistance to *power*; it draws its inspiration from power. It is not an attitude, but a counter-attitude. Despite this, in the eyes of the students and social scientists of our day it has become the slogan for struggle.

I think that this understanding of resistance caricaturized above, has a lot in common with power. More precisely, this kind of binary codification should be seen as self-fulfilling-prophecies rather than as ontological determinations. The reproduction of power is imminent to the logic of existential domains that are constituted not as action but as reaction. The very state of reaction dialectically turns into the thing that it reacts to, that is, its opposite – just like the vengeance of the slaves who envy the power of their masters in Nietzsche.

Is there a political alternative other than action-reaction politics? This is a question which has been weighing on my mind for a very long time. As a member of a generation who believed – who was made to believe – that the main thing was to become independent, I had not even felt the urge to ask the question whether we would attain freedom by being emancipated from something, that is, by breaking away from something that keeps us under oppression, hinders our freedom. However, now I am convinced that the relationship between emancipation and freedom is not immediate or unproblematic. Does not the dilemma of the discussion described above make it crystal clear that freedom is not a necessary product of resistance or struggle for independence? It seems almost impossible for the opponents who are not even aware that they are reproducing power not to generate other and new oppression mechanisms even if they dispose of one of the forms oppression takes.

I believe this is one of the points where the Zapatistas can offer an alternate way out. What renders the Zapatistas unique is their devotion to developing a genuine and principled form of politics that goes well beyond masculine politics which is dubbed real politics, conflict and challenge strategies, the end justifies the means logic, the interests of the leader who is disconnected from the roots and the qualm over votes. Such that, the seven founding principles of the Zapatista organization are oriented towards developing a behavioural ethics that the prevailing types of politics can very easily overlook, and even idle away: serving the others instead of serving one’s own interests, obeying instead of issuing orders, representing others instead of speaking in their names, descending instead of ascending, persuading instead of defeating, constructing instead of destructing, suggesting instead of imposing.

The best answer to be given to those who claim that primitiveness to such extent is a bit too “idealist” for politics and that it renders the struggle impossible, is the fact that the movement and the insurgence have been going on for twenty five and fifteen years, respectively. The sustainability of this struggle that does not die down despite the intensive paramilitary activities of the Mexican army in the region, despite the tension between the Zapatistas and the traditional left parties, and despite the excessive poverty and deprivation of the region, is actually related to the condition of having principles. It should be understood that this is the reason why the international support given to the Zapatistas never ceases and the number of the voluntary

activists who flow to the region never decreases. And this is the only way to dream of building an alternate world.

In my opinion, the difference between freedom and independence lies here. According to the Zapatista understanding, no people, no ethnic identity, no religious group or class can be “free” just because they are struggling against the power that oppresses them. Of course, they can guarantee the precondition of freedom – that is, independence – if their struggle is successful; however, there is no guarantee that they will not be subject to other masters just at the moment they think they have attained the right to determine their own destiny. In order to transform a “victimized” subject into a “powerful” subject, besides struggling against an external power, an organizational model should be constituted that will prevent a similar power structure from being generated inside.

Zapatistas refuse to establish a party and take part in the existing political space. Their aim is to generate an alternative mode of politics. They think this is the sine qua non of principled politics; they believe it is inevitable for political parties to degenerate, and to disconnect from the people. They say: “We think that a people who do not keep their governors under control are doomed to be slaves; we have struggled for freedom, not for changing masters every six years.” The villagers in Zapatista communities who alternately undertake administrative tasks have been building a self-governing mechanism in the real sense of the word since 2003. They exhibit admirable experimentation and creativity in several domains such as collective agriculture, a justice that is not abstract, alternative health, revolutionary education, and autonomous governmentality.

Even beyond the apprehension that the struggle cannot be one-dimensional, and that freedom cannot be attained through several rights solely granted to the indigenous identity, the consciousness that domination is a multi-dimensional system has stemmed directly from this concrete experience. They move along by learning in and through their participation in the process that an indigenous person who does not own land would remain captive even if he was entitled to Constitutional rights, that if an alternative economic model to neo-capitalism is not produced political independence by itself would not have a meaning; yet, on the other hand, an alternative solely reduced to economy would remain insufficient in terms of political and social freedom. “Previously, that is, in the beginning, we did not think about all these; our sole thought was to struggle. But today we are working for the establishment of autonomy”, says a member of the agricultural council.

What I want to underline here is this: the concreteness of everyday life, which is summarized in the previous sentence as “all these,” presents the Zapatista communities with a series of problems so complicated that it is impossible to exhaust them with simple logics. Autonomy is grappling with a diversity and variability that no -ism can foresee and formulate solutions for in advance.

For example, the answer to the question how should an alternate education be, can only be given in the process through trial and error, gropingly finding solutions. In an international meeting in July 2007 I attended, delegates coming from five autonomous Zapatista regions told us about the problems they have encountered and the solutions they have produced in a few domains of which they were trying to build the alternatives. Rather than being preoccupied with presenting a collective image to their supporters like me or propagating themselves through various empty slogans (such as “the fraternity of the peoples” or “our legitimate struggle”), they preferred to make self-criticism. Someone coming from our part of the world would have expected to be silenced on the basis of arguments such as “family secrets” or “in the name of the cause” for the kind of self-criticism that the Zapatistas did not abstain from making in front of “all the world”. Zapatistas thought otherwise; they believed that this was going to strengthen them. For instance, it had been necessary to consider the fundamental needs of children and communities when an educational program that did not stick to the curriculum specified by the Mexican ministry of national education was being prepared. Separating the children from their families who depended on their labor during harvest times created problems in the agriculturalist communities in the already impoverished regions. Zapatistas also thought that the grading

system – a system that individualized the students – had no other benefit than serving the needs of capitalism. Certainly, it was desired that the alternative system be collectivist; however, it was not desired that the collectivity oppress differences. Among the solutions they came up with in order to deal with this dilemma, the ones can recount here and which I found striking were the following: There is nothing like a minimum or maximum period of study; every child advances in accordance to his/her capacity and speed. This has been thought as a method of preserving their differences without rendering them individualist. Not only is nobody expelled from school, but there is no grading system either. Parents evaluate the success of their children. The boarding school system is adopted. Depending on the needs, after spending a month in school the children go back to their family houses for a month or 15 days and fulfil their tasks in the fields or the village. Learning mathematics, for instance, through fruits and vegetables, or through shopping in the bazaar, in order not to separate theoretical and practical work, to use traditional measurement systems such as span besides the metric system, to give priority to team work over individual work are among the methods used in the Zapatista education system. As one pedagogue indicated: “Education is learning to analyze, not learning to imitate whatever you see.” Zapatistas hope to develop critical thinking rather than making the children unquestioningly memorize the traditions, and to ensure that the child understands phenomena such as poverty, injustice, and dominance both conceptually and within their historical developments. They are trying to embed an ethics based on sharing and participation.

To give another example, it may be stimulating to share here what a Spanish psychologist who has been working for eleven years with communities in coping with trauma told me: We – Europeans – immediately run to the doctor when we are ill and ask for medical treatment. However, the majority of illnesses are psycho-somatic. Indigenous communities begin the treatment from the heart of the person; that is, his/her state of mind, his/her coherence with his/herself and with the environment. I have witnessed that they cure many illnesses with incenses and plants, through touching or talking. This is a completely different understanding of health. By virtue of an integral look that does not reduce the person to his/her organs, teeth, or body parts, they significantly decrease the need for medicine or clinic attention.

Likewise, the Zapatistas are involved in a multi-faceted struggle against criteria and standards that capitalist modernity has rendered natural. Against abstract labour which makes commodity fetishism possible, they place on the use item the name of the labourer who has produced it and the amount of time he/she spent for the production together with the price of the item. The abstraction of the labor time from real time for the aims of exchange, and the fact that the subject of the exchange becomes the product rather than the producer, are elemental qualities of commodity fetishism which renders exploitation and the surplus value invisible. The correlation capitalism forms between efficiency and time is also among the apprehensions that the Zapatistas fight against. For instance, be it in the workplace or in politics, what capitalism understands from an “efficient” meeting is one which takes place within a previously determined period of time (1-2 hours) and in the end a decision is taken in conformity with the majority rule. Zapatistas, on the other hand, do not block the way of the discussion of a problem that concerns everybody through fetishizing numbers. If the decision to be taken is an important one and if there are differences in opinion then the meeting may last for three days. Within that period of time people talk, eat and drink together, and spend the night in that same place. When the will of the majority crystallizes, those who are not of the same opinion are asked whether they have a serious reservation about agreeing with the majority or not. Even if the decision is made in conformity with the majority rule, the minority should be convinced that the discussion and the decision-making process have been “fair.”

As a matter of course, egos clash against each other and different imaginations collide with each other in the processes of constructing alternatives to capitalism and to the modes of living, thinking, working, producing, possessing, and living together that it imposes, renders natural, and generalizes. However, the advantage of a participatory struggle stemming from below and from inside the materiality of everyday life is this: the perspective of any single ego cannot be sufficient to solve all the problems by itself. Moreover, the implementation of every solution reveals its deficiencies and breaches; it needs to be corrected and reconsidered. Hence, no ego

can render its legitimacy and rightfulness absolute. Sovereign reflexes are rasped in such a thorny process as the actual construction of autonomy and no longer constitute obstacles to the foundation of communalization.

What is even more important is that, in the process of the transformation of the negativity of reaction to the positivity of construction – that is when striving to achieve freedom itself beyond a struggle for emancipation – unity against a common enemy is replaced by an interest in a common world. Instead of thinking *against* something or some people, the ethics of thinking *together* with others develops in this very process.

According to the very striking expression of a Zapatista teacher, what the Zapatistas are doing is: “what we at the moment construct ... are subjects that are going to walk a different path.” These are not subjects who occupy a corner in the politics of action-reaction. Neither are they subjects who select an -ism or a political attitude among the existing ones and slip it on like a ready-to-wear piece of clothing. They have not been constructed before the struggle, independent of their practices. On the contrary, they are the products of the efforts of becoming related, of communalization, and of generating alternative practices. They have an ethical awareness arising out of the acknowledgment through both mental and practical processes that the social state is ambivalent and ambiguous. The communalization ideal, which is assumed by the parliament in democratic political regimes and therefore confined to only one institution of living together and which is expected to come to life through mere discussion, takes on a material reality in all areas of life in the Zapatista communities.

I suppose the most striking way of concluding this paper which is in fact endless is to give the Coca Cola example. In the classical left and/or anarchist world imaginations of the Western activists who are not products of real struggles, Coca Cola has a different representative power. Coca Cola is not only the symbol of American imperialism, but at the same time it represents capitalism’s colonization of everyday life and its construction of new addictions through the ideology of consumption. To refuse to drink Coca Cola is imagined not only as a symbolic resistance but also a practical one. For example, in anti-globalization forums to drink *maté* – the traditional herb tea of South America– instead of Coca Cola has become a signifier of alternativeness. Western activists who have been equipped with such imaginations were shocked to see the abundant consumption of Coca Cola when they came to the second “inter-galaxies” meeting organized by the Zapatistas in July 2007. They even expressed the discomfort they felt. The response of Subcomandante Marcos of The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) was something like: “Because water has been privatized in Mexico its price is 10 pesos. Coca Cola, on the other hand, because it is being imported from the USA as a product backed by the American capital, is sold for 6 pesos, meaning Coca Cola is cheaper than water. How can I tell the indigenous people to drink water instead of Coca Cola? Moreover, to criticize Zapatistas who are all struggling to construct alternative modes of production, solely for their consumption preferences, to attempt to teach them a lesson on morals, is a great disrespect!”

In other words, what the Western leftists who attended the Zapatista meeting did not understand (and maybe will not understand) is the following: Criticizing Zapatistas for drinking Coca Cola is an act of classification and organization that flattens the intricateness and difficulty of the local struggle. To label Zapatistas for having bourgeoisie consumption habits is to confine them into a binary codification such as “either they are alternative and do not drink Coca Cola or they are not and they drink Coca Cola.” It is to make the power Coca Cola represents the criterion of one’s actions and attitudes. It is reaction rather than action politics. And at the same time, it casts doubt on the image of a movement whose struggle is not a reaction against power, but a struggle to create a genuine alternative life-style, and thereby sabotaging the aid that comes from the West that they really need.

The moral of the story is: the line between claiming to oppose power in discourse and *actual* opposition is not as smooth as it is presumed to be.