printing & assembly instructions

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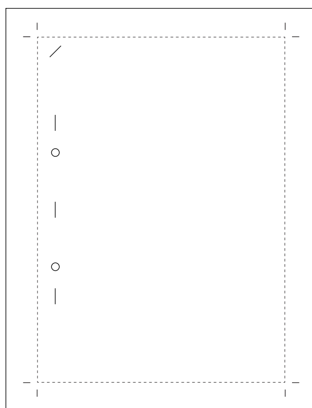

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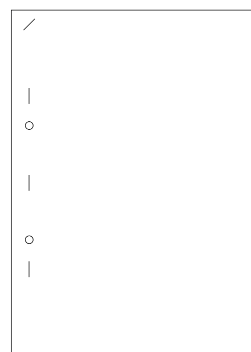

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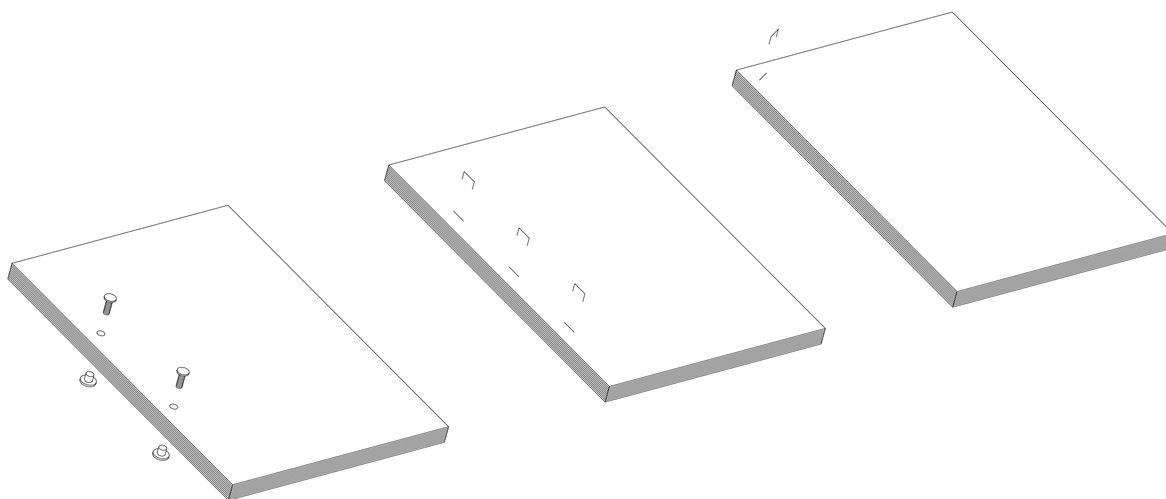

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(1) PAPER SIZE	use A4 (210 x 297 mm) or US Letter (215.9 x 279.4 mm)
(2) PRITING AND TRIMMING	print in “actual size”. choose single sided printing. use crop marks to trim the edges of the paper
(3) BOOK SIZE AND GUIDE	final size should be 240 x 172 mm (9.44 x 6.77 in). use the other marks as a guide for binding
(4) BINDING	we suggest using screws or staples. a binder can be used for collecting multiple articles

YÁSNAYA ELENA A. GIL

Never Again Mexico without Us? *

A River

The name of a river that springs from the Tibetan plateau, passes through India, and crosses Pakistan has a disquieting history. Its name in Spanish, *Indo*, comes from an ancient language reserved for the works and sacred writings of Hinduism. From the Sanskrit "sindhu," the word moved into Persian as "hindush," into Greek as "indós"; from there it became the Latin "indus," later settling in Spanish as "indo." The name of this river came to be related to the region we call India; and later, through a history of geographical misunderstandings with which we are by now all familiar, the demonym "indian" ended up being used to name the members of the peoples that lived on the American continent when the European colonizers arrived. The old name of a river, mentioned in the most ancient Indian text, also acquired, in remote latitudes, a strongly derogatory connotation. I think about this river when, in a taxicab, I hear the driver hurl a string of insults at someone that almost caused an accident, insults that culminate with a resounding "indian."

Contrary to what many people believe, the "indi-" of the words "indian" and "indigenous" have no etymological relationship. Far from the watery origin of "indian," the word "indigenous" comes from Latin and was used to designate the attribution of a birthplace: "indi-" (from there) and "gen-" (born); its etymological meaning was "born there" or "aboriginal." In the oldest usages of the word "indigenous" we can find in Spanish, it exhibits an etymologically strict meaning. At that time, "indigenous" designated anyone and everyone "born there"; the deictic nature of the word "there" allowed the word "indigenous" to take its meaning according to the location to which it made reference. How is it that two words that are so distinct, indian and indigenous, could be used centuries later to designate—apparently—the same category? How did they get their current meaning?

These words, indian and indigenous, could also be washed of their meaning—their colors made to fade—in the middle of a river that would take with it the foundations that define them since, currently, at least, it is the existence of nation-states that defines them. In other words: in a certain scene of the future, these words could become trivial, happily irrelevant. Envisioning that scenario is the primary purpose of this essay.

A Historic Accident

Thanks to the Mixe political scientist Tajëëw Díaz Robles, I found out about the Mapuche journalist Pedro Cayuqueo, author of the extraordinary book *Sólo por ser indios y otras crónicas mapuches* [Just for Being Indians and other Mapuche Chronicles], in which, among other things, the tension between the Chilean State and the indigenous peoples—especially the Mapuche—is made evident. In one of the interviews Cayuqueo gives, he declares that he is Mapuche, that his nationality is Mapuche, but that he has a Chilean passport due to a regrettable historic accident that he would prefer not to mention. Behind this declaration—beyond clever—I see two fundamental elements for understanding the current situation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and the world: the unique features of each of the peoples and nations, and the emergence—lamentable to Cayuqueo—of a world divided into legal entities called States.

Though it may seem a pointless declaration, I want to emphasize this obvious remark: never in the history of humanity has the world been divided into just over 200 counties under an ideological model in which each one has had an identity, a flag, a history, a language, and a series of associated symbols constructed for it. It is almost impossible today to think of the world without these divisions, divisions that on many occasions are assumed to have always existed as original givens, or as the mode in which the world has been organized since it began. The division of the world into national States is also used as a telescope to look into the past: "pre-Columbian Mexico" we tend to say frequently, ignoring the great inaccuracy of the phrase, for "pre-Columbian" by necessity excludes Mexico, a state created barely 200 years ago.

The existence of a couple hundred States in the world clashes with a reality: the existence of thousands and thousands of nations that have been encapsulated within those 200 States. The Ainu people in Japan; the Sami people that live in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia; and the Mixe people in Oaxaca are considered indigenous peoples despite being from different nations themselves and having very contrasting historical experiences. They are united by one characteristic under the category "indigenous": the fact of not having become a State themselves, the fact of having been encapsulated within other States. What's more: these States have created homogenizing practices and narratives that deny the very existence of other

nations—nations with language, land, and a past in common.

The great trick of the modern State is that, by force of nationalist ideology, they have made us believe that beyond States they are also nations. Nations, understood to mean peoples of the world, are not necessarily States. The false equivalence of nation-state underlies the logic and workings of the current world and generates categories that are unsustainable in principle, such as "French culture," when in continental France alone, another twelve distinct languages are spoken in addition to French; or like "Mexican culture," when Mexicans (i.e., those belonging to the Mexican state) speak languages that are grouped into twelve linguistic families, each of these radically distinct, and belong to more than sixty-eight nations with very pronounced cultural differences. Mexico is a State, not a nation. Mexico is a State that has encapsulated and denied the existence of many nations. The Mexican constitution is quite telling with respect to the establishment of those equivalences when it announces that "the Mexican nation is unique and indivisible." If it really were, the decree would be unnecessary.

Based on the number of distinct languages in the world, we could say that there are approximately 7,000 nations, spread out across approximately 200 States, 200 countries. The consequence of this is that most of the nations in the world do not have a State to back them, nor an army to protect their autonomy. States make pacts with specific individuals that it recognizes as equal citizens under the law—and not with the nations and communities that, in reality, make up the State.

In order to establish the nation-state equivalence, modern States have dedicated themselves to fighting the existence of other nations. In 1998 the speakers of the other languages that exist in France, like Breton, Catalan, and Aragonese asked the French state to recognize their languages in the Constitution. This proposition was met with fierce opposition; the French Academy, for example, which rarely speaks publicly, declared that "regional languages threaten national identity." These words seem to me a tacit acceptance of the ideology that sustains States: the mere existence of languages and nations that are different from the ones created by the States threatens the State project itself.

The nations of the world that did not become States are the negation of the State project. The majority of these nations are known as indigenous nations or peoples. By

now far from the etymological meaning, the category of “indigenous” becomes a political category, not a cultural one, nor a racial one (though it surely has been racialized). Indigenous are the nations without a State. This is why the Ainu peoples in Japan, the Sami peoples in Norway and the Mixe peoples in Oaxaca are indigenous. This status also unites peoples like the Catalans and Scots.

Mexico’s case is quite telling. As Federico Navarrete has already pointed out in his book, *México racista: una denuncia* [Racist Mexico: A Denouncement], the national project had as one of its principal objectives the deceitful creation of the “mestizo” category: “the new Mexican mestizos…,” writes Navarrete , “were not the product of a ‘racial’ or ‘cultural’ mixing, but of a political and social change that created a new identity. In historical and cultural terms, this way of being, baptized as mestizo, was closer to the Western culture of the Creole elites than to any of the indigenous or African traditions that coexisted in the territory of our country.”

The “mestizo” category necessarily opposes the “indigenous” category for the Mexican State project created this binary opposition in the 20th century. The linguist Michael Swanton has noted that the word “indigenous” was not used with its current meaning during the colonial period, and that it was not used as we use it today until well into the 19th century. For the Spanish empire, the nations that inhabited these territories were “Indians,” and that category was part of a complex caste system that was simplified, after Independence, into a binary opposition for the Mexican State: indigenous-mestizo. If for the Spanish empire we were Indians, for the Mexican State we are indigenous, even if these are used today as interchangeable terms.

Nevertheless, every struggle for recognition by the nations of the world without a State connects to these categories in a different way, as Francesca Gargallo points out in *Feminismos desde Abya Yala: ideas y proposiciones de las mujeres de 607 pueblos en nuestra América* [Feminisms from Abya Yala: Women’s Ideas and Propositions of 607 Peoples in Our America]. “The Mapuche people,” writes Gargallo, “refuse to be called ‘Indians’ and they reject the label ‘indigenous’ because they are Mapuche, a nation that has not been colonized, while the Aymara affirm that ‘if we were conquered as “Indians,” then as Indians we will liberate ourselves.” As we can see in the case of the Mapuche, the refusal of the labels “Indian” and “indigenous” implies the denial of European colonization or the State’s internal colonialism. In the case of Mexico, one part of the so-called indigenous movement has strictly rejected the label “indigenous” and has

preferred the term "aboriginal," which brings another set of implications into play. On the contrary, another part of the movement has decided to use the term and category of "indigenous" to name a series of struggles and circumstances that unite different peoples.

Given that the creation of a world divided into nation-states is recent the status of "indigenous" is not essential but, rather, a product of the "lamentable historic accident" to which Pedro Cayuqueo refers. As the historian Sebastian Van Doesburg points out, the categories of "Mixe," "Mapuche," or "Mixteco," for example, allow us to glimpse a different future—in fact, a present—in which identity is not constructed exclusively in relation to the nation-state, as is the case with the label "indigenous." The term "indigenous," we cannot forget, only covers 200 years of the 9,000 years of Mixe or Mesoamerican history (taking the domestication of corn as its genesis).

A Mexico with Us?

The Mexican State has designed public policies, enacted laws and spent budgets to erase the existence of other nations and other languages. Forced Hispanicization is an example of a public policy that has denied, quite successfully, the right of young indigenous populations to access education in their mother tongue. The unbelievable Law on the National Coat of Arms, Flag and Anthem [*Ley sobre el Escudo, la Bandera y el Himno Nacionales*] dictates the appropriate ways to *legally*—the redundancy is worth emphasizing—honor a series of symbols that help sustain the idea that the State is also a nation, unique and indivisible.

It is figured that, at the beginning of the 19th century, after 300 years of Spanish colonialism, approximately 65% of the population of the nascent Mexican State spoke one of the many indigenous languages of the country. If, now, after 200 years of life under a State, speakers of indigenous languages represent only 6.5% of the population, we can say that indigenous groups are not minorities, but have been *minoritized,* and that the supposed mestizo majority is in reality the population that has been *disindigenized* by the State project. If the current trend continues, in about 100 years, indigenous peoples will represent just 0.5% of the Mexican population—the culmination of the State project of homogenization.

Denying the existence of nations other than the one created by Mexican nationalism

not only affects the political status of indigenous peoples, that denial has also had direct consequences such as the violation of the human rights of people that belong to indigenous groups. The different physical and psychological punishments that speakers of indigenous languages received during the processes of forced Hispanicization are examples of these violations of basic rights. The majority of the problems we indigenous peoples currently face are connected to the State project in which we are enrolled. In the case of Mexico, for example, the authorization of projects in hydroelectricity, mining, and oil that the State has authorized in territories belonging to indigenous peoples directly threatens the management and communal property of those territories. According to the National Agrarian Registry, more than 75% of the territory in the state of Oaxaca is social property (communal or *ejidal*), and in that territory more than 300 concessions, which have not been subject to [indigenous] consultation, have been authorized and made to mining companies.

Faced with this reality, indigenous peoples have demanded the right to autonomy and self-determination as nations, nations without a State that need to manage the "*res publica*" for themselves and by themselves. As part of this struggle, little by little, a series of international mechanisms and legal resources have been built that have as their objective to endow greater autonomy to indigenous peoples as nations without States. Among these legal mechanisms, the International Labor Organization's Convention C-169, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and, in the case of Mexico, the 2001 reform of Article 2 of the Constitution stand out.

Nevertheless, modern States have generally demonstrated great resistance to recognizing the autonomy and the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples. For the Mexican State, in particular, the "indigenous problem" is seen as a failure of the project of incorporation, which would ideally integrate indigenous peoples into that *ad hoc* culture in which all people speak Spanish, exercise their political rights in the same way, and in which the State manages all of the territories and natural resources. The problem for the State, and for a good portion of the movement for indigenous peoples' rights, has been the need to create something that I have tried calling a "Mexico with Us": a politics of integration into the mechanisms of the State. In this kind of project, the inclusion of individuals belonging to indigenous groups is sought, while the participation of their communities as a whole is impeded. For example, it is celebrated that the number of indigenous people in the local Chamber of Deputies in

the state of Oaxaca has increased in the past decades, even though those deputies represent the interests of the political parties that nominated them more than the interests of the indigenous groups to which they belong. In contrast, an initiative from four years ago of constitutional reform presented by the indigenous groups of Oaxaca to the local legislature that proposed, among other things, the creation of an indigenous parliament where the groups could have direct representation without having to go through political parties, has been held up. Another example: the system for education scholarships for indigenous youth, which are awarded by different institutions, follows an integrationist logic, while the construction of an educational system proper to each indigenous group without State interference seems a distant reality.

Contrary to that integrationist approach, for many indigenous peoples and communities, the demand resides in the State recognizing the autonomy and self-determination of indigenous nations, it resides in the State recognizing legal pluralism and the distinct forms that indigenous peoples and communities have for the management of their social and political organization, which in many cases work very differently from the Mexican State's. For this movement, it is necessary to create a Mexico that does not absorb nor standardize the "us," a State that does not have as its ultimate goal the integration of indigenous peoples into that fabricated ideal that it has called "mestizo."

A Pluricultural Nation or a Plurinational State?

In addition to historical problems, we indigenous peoples face, in the present, severe threats that put our territories at risk. The Mexican government has conceded a large part of indigenous peoples' territories to companies with neoextractivist projects like mining, hydroelectric and petroleum extraction, among others. These concessions are proof of the contradictions of the State: on the one hand, it has signed treaties that obligate it to consult indigenous peoples before conceding their territories; on the other, it believes that the natural resources on Mexican land are federal property. Despite the State recognizing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and, equally, Convention C-169 of the International Labor Organization, which recognize the autonomy of indigenous peoples over their lives and territories (the latter being the link), in practice it is far from truly recognizing the self-determination of indigenous peoples, and from consulting them when it comes to undertaking projects within their territories.

In 2001 the second article of the Constitution was modified as a result of the emergence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in 1994 and the San signing of the Andrés Accords in 1996. It now recognizes that "The Mexican nation is unique and indivisible. The nation is multicultural, based originally on its indigenous peoples [...] Indigenous peoples' right to self-government shall be subjected to the Constitution in order to guarantee national unity." Even though this reform represents an important advance, the fact that the Mexican State declares itself as a nation and that the existence of indigenous groups is thought of from the perspective of cultural diversity is noteworthy. This is how the Mexican State maintains the fiction that legitimizes its existence: it keeps narrating itself as if it were a nation with cultural diversity. On the one hand, it concedes autonomy to indigenous peoples; on the other, it declares itself as the only possible nation.

Cultural diversity is a trait of all societies. As such, cultural diversity also presents itself within each of the indigenous nations, which are far from being homogenous groups, culturally speaking. Acknowledging the obvious cultural diversity does not have the same political implications declaring the existence of a plurinational state would have. This is the trap of neoliberal multiculturalism, as various authors have called it.

Faced with a reality that casts serious doubts on its legitimacy, the Mexican State has distanced itself from integrationist indigenism (at least in theory) in favor of a discourse that praises multiculturality. The results seem almost identical to me. The State tolerates, and even encourages, the existence of indigenous peoples only when it comes to their cultural manifestations. The official spaces that have opened their doors to indigenous peoples are, above all, concentrated in the cultural sector, while the political spaces remain closed still. While there are more and more prizes for literary production in indigenous languages, registering a girl with a name in Otomí continues to be a troublesome ordeal.

To avoid acknowledging that this country is really a State in which many nations exist, Mexico has preferred to confine the indigenous nations to cultural categories and not political ones, despite the fact that the Constitution concedes autonomy to them. The Mexican identitarian narrative, reinforced every Monday in school, and often strengthened by anthropological studies, has caught the indigenous peoples' struggle for autonomy in a trap. The trap has consisted of essentializing an indigenous

characteristic and designating it as a cultural one. It is quite common to read studies entitled “Indigenous Worldview,” “Indigenous Music,” or “Indigenous Dance,” as if we that do not make up States had to have, for that reason alone, a single world view, a single music, or a single type of dance. The indigenous movement itself has fallen, many times, it seems to me, in the trap of making “indigenous” an essential trait, when it is, in reality, a political trait that should be temporary. This narrative, which maintains the fiction that the Mexican State is a nation rich in cultural diversity, hides the practice of erasure that its creation involved as well as the violence it has exercised on different nations that have their own language, their own past, and a common territory. As long as we treat the category “indigenous” as a cultural one, the State will continue to use it as a veil to hide the fact that the integrationist project and the violence associated with it continue onward at full speed.

Us without Mexico

In a virtual exchange, Pedro Cayuqueo pointed out to me the surprise with which he had understood, from his point of view, one of the principle slogans of the Zapatista movement: “Never Again a Mexico without Us.” The movement Cayuqueo subscribes to seeks just the opposite: a Chile without Mapuches, Mapuches without the Chilean State, a State that lets the Mapuches exercise their rightful autonomy.

The practices and nationalist discourse of the Mexican State have been very successful because they have turned an ideology into personal feelings, from which it is very hard to free oneself. State nationalism makes the existence of the Mexican State as a unique nation, as a unique identity, as a cultural unity seem like something perfectly natural. The flag, the anthem, the symbols, the celebrations and the nation’s altars—these are the fundamental elements that constitute the narrative with which the very existence of indigenous peoples has been violated. The practices of Mexican nationalism made possible, in large part, the physical and psychological punishments that the indigenous youth suffered as they were forced to violently accept Spanish as the national language. State nationalism is what justified the displacement the Chinantecos and Mazatecos suffered when, for the good of the “nation,” they had to leave their territory so that the State could build the Miguel Alemán Dam in Oaxaca. Mexican nationalism is the narrative that justifies the racist violence that the indigenous peoples of Mexico have suffered.

Despite everything, and against the very workings of the Mexican State, indigenous peoples have exercised a certain degree of autonomy. For example, a large number of indigenous communities in Oaxaca organize themselves differently than the Mexican State. In many Oaxacan municipalities, local elections are run without political parties, without electoral campaigns, and through assemblies; the municipal authorities do not get paid a salary and the limit of their authority is the commoner's assembly; public safety, access to water and many services are communally managed. The local legislature only just recognized these practices in 1995. Every time that indigenous peoples have demanded full acknowledgment of their autonomy, the voices of intellectual liberals have resounded with warnings of a feared "Balkanization." This is the liberal State denying yet again that its very origins entailed the denial of the existence of other nations.

Even when legislation grants indigenous groups autonomy and self-determination, the State does not recognize them in practice. We indigenous peoples rarely participate in the design of the educational, healthcare, or judicial programs that affect us. The Mexican State is designed to inhibit the exercise of autonomy. It does this so well that it is possible that, before becoming a truly plurinational State, the *mestizaje* project, which intends to erase indigenous communities, could be completed.

What does the autonomy of indigenous peoples look like? In another conversation with Cayuqueo, we thought of two possible outs. The first: the establishment of plurinational States, States that, as legal entities, could confederate the nations that make them up, and in which every one of those nations has a high degree of autonomy and self-government. I think this is the model that a large part of the indigenous movement aspires to, and it is already a reality, at least on paper, in the constitution of Bolivia, which declares itself a plurinational State.

Other movements have proposed another way out: the idea that, in order to enjoy maximum autonomy and maximum self-government, it is necessary to create an independent State. If we indigenous peoples are indigenous because we do not make up a State, then one possible way to do away with the violence associated with the indigenous category is to make our own State (after all, Vatican City has a territory much smaller than that of the Mixe). This proposal, without a doubt, is the one that sounds the most alarms. While the discourses of State nationalism are plenty tolerated

and even exalted, non-State nationalisms are judged to be dangerous. The existence of a Spanish flag, for example, receives a different reading than does the reclaiming of the Catalan flag. The Mexican flag does not appear to be an affront, but the existence of a Yaqui flag often inspires doubt and suspicion. Even when State nationalisms have had the most terrible consequences on humanity, it is the non-State nationalisms that receive the most condemnation.

Beyond the practical difficulties, taking the autonomous path by creating an independent State implies various troubling contradictions. The State model is precisely the form of government that indigenous groups have resisted: so why should we replicate it? The fact that indigenous nations have not become national States defies the liberal model that created those States. Would creating an independent State be, paradoxically, succumbing to the same ideology that we are trying to resist?

The possible paths to real autonomy bring about interesting discussions. The existence of a Mixe anthem and flag, for example, gives me mixed feelings. On the one hand, I recognize that they symbolize the resistance of the Mixe nation against the exercises of homogenization and erasure to which the Mexican State has subjected them; on the other, they represent copies of the symbolic mechanisms of the State. It is also necessary to create an autonomy of symbols through which belonging to our nationalities can be expressed, without the imaginary built by States. The confederation of the Iroquois peoples in the United States, which has issued its own passports, poses a serious challenge to the State, but, in a way, they are copying the [State's] mechanisms themselves.

Proposing the creation of independent States, beyond the scandal it provokes every time it is brought up, demonstrates that our imagination, too, has been coopted. We need to imagine other possible forms of social and political organization, a world post-nation-States, a world not divided into countries. "Us without Mexico" means us without a State, without the Mexican state, and without the creation of other States. Contrary to the integrationist model, the "Us without Mexico" model does not seek to integrate peoples and individuals into the State's mechanisms, but rather to confront them and do without as many of them as possible.

In a world without States, the category of "indigenous" ceases to have meaning. We are

indigenous so long as we belong to peoples that did not create States. In a conversation on the subject, someone asked if what we want is then to stop being indigenous. Ideally, yes. Ideally, we could stop being indigenous—not to become mestizos, but to just be Mixes, Mapuches, Samis, or Raramuris.

Seizing Functions from the State

The objective I am proposing begins with imagining. Imagining "Us without Mexico," is to envision a world without States, autonomous communities capable of managing the communal life of indigenous peoples—which would then cease to be indigenous—without the intervention of State institutions.

Fighting the nationalist discourses and practices of the State is also fundamental: to refuse to honor a flag that represents an ethnocidal State; to stop replicating all the practices that reinforce the idea that Mexico is a nation; to stop loving Mexico because States should not be loved. Resisting symbols is important for it undermines the narrative that sustains and legitimizes States.

A few years ago, in Oaxaca some youths burned a Mexican flag in public during a protest. The responses seemed incommensurate to me: leftwing and rightwing politicians both condemned the act, public opinion was indignant, the youths were detained and, in an incredible turn of events, the government's institutions invented and enacted a "ceremony of amends to the national flag," in which various voices publicly apologized to the flag. In a country built on the ethnocide of indigenous peoples, in a country with thousands of missing people, in a country full of secret graves, the State has never organized a public apology, yet here it was offered to a burnt flag.

The very existence of indigenous peoples with distinct languages, territories, and political organizations, is seen as an affront to the existence of Mexico as a single mestizo nation. Our existence and continued presence are understood with the same offense as a burning flag. Well, fine: in order to build a future for indigenous peoples it is necessary to continue burning flags, at least symbolically. Resistance to nationalist practices is necessary and urgent.

Given the context, have we not already wasted enough time and effort asking the

Mexican State to recognize and respect our autonomy? The battles have been many and the achievements few. What can we do? Besides resisting the actions and the symbols of the State, it is important to begin snatching away its functions.

Liberal logic points us in another direction: it tells us that we have to work to improve the functions of state institutions and hope they will respect the exercise of autonomy. Reality shows us, however, that there is not much to hope for on that path: today indigenous territories face strong threats and the project of mestizaje continues its implacable course despite strong resistance to it. In the opposite direction, it is possible to try to do without the services of the State and instead strengthen the self-governing spaces that many indigenous communities have created throughout their history. It is even possible to go beyond and seize the functions with which the State exercises oppression: creating an educational system for each indigenous nation, as well as autonomously managing healthcare and judicial systems.

If combatting nationalist ideology is fundamental, so is proposing some guiding ideas for the management of autonomous life. Given the great diversity of realities that indigenous peoples live, it is difficult to sketch just one possible scene for the construction of self-governing structures that are as distant as possible from the mechanism of the State. Despite these challenges, it is possible to sketch a few guiding ideas.

With respect to territory: although a large part of indigenous peoples' territory is managed as social property (communal or ejidal), many indigenous peoples cannot count on the [State's] recognition of these territories. A first step would be declaring the existence of autonomous, indigenous territories in which the State could not authorize extractivist projects which threaten the health and quality of life of the people there, as is the case with open-pit mining. Autonomy over territory serves as a base for the development of communal life and the management of other social matters. Without the possibility of autonomously managing their own territories indigenous people will not be able to adequately carry out other necessary functions such as the use of natural resources and the structuring of a more just internal market. For example, in the case of the Mixe, and as the Mixe anthropologist Floriberto Díaz had suggested in the 1980s, the surplus of corn production in the lowlands could cover the needs of territories in the highlands, which would then not be forced to buy the imported corn supplied by Diconsa, a State supplier. Greater control over territory

would have a direct impact on different issues like commerce, food supply, and even the management of things like public safety.

With respect to forms of government: although the constitution recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to choose their own forms of government, it is necessary for this recognition to be real and transversal. In the case of Oaxaca, political entities like the local electoral institute or the state's Ministry of Government do recognize the existence of municipalities that elect authorities without political parties, however, the Ministry of Finance does not recognize those municipalities as having their own mechanisms for the administration of economic resources and treats them like any other municipality, which generates very complex situations. Beyond recognition from the State, it is necessary to strengthen those diverse ways of managing the *res publica* that do not pass through the structure of the national political parties.

With respect to the serving of justice: just as the forms of government are many, so too are the mechanisms for serving justice. More than pitting the Mexican judicial system against an indigenous judicial system, as it is commonly called, it is necessary to recognize the existence of multiple forms of understanding justice, punishment, and the repair of damage. Since the beginning of positive rights, the administration of justice in indigenous communities has always been seen as savage. Regardless, we must acknowledge, debate, and recreate good practices that have emerged within the communities with respect to the serving of justice. Indigenous communities already impart a significant amount of justice in this country by way of community judges, and this is a fact that cannot be ignored. Better yet, it is necessary to strengthen a juridical pluralism that can offer diverse and multiple, culturally situated responses to the call for justice.

With respect to the management of public safety: currently, the task of providing public safety in indigenous communities is already carried out by them. What's more: in the absence of the State in recent times armed community police have emerged and put the Mexican judicial system in check. Faced with the overwhelming reality in which organized crime has taken control of a large part of the country, community organizations have in fact solved, in many cases, the call for public safety. Perhaps it is in this sector where the hand of the State is most absent, or is most deficient, but in which the State also punishes the fact that communities exercise functions that in theory belong to it, as the criminalization of the community police shows.

Nevertheless, in cases like Cherán, in Michoacán, it has been demonstrated that community organization is an effective means for loca security and surveillance. It is an advantage that, in many cases, the organized units or the communities are small, for this permits a higher degree of control over the territory to be monitored and permits the assembly of a small confederation of guard units.

With respect to the management of healthcare: currently, the State healthcare system does not possess the necessary resources to tend to indigenous patients in their own languages (with all the consequences this brings), nor does it consider the indigenous cultural elements of healthcare. The possibility of communally managed healthcare would permit the establishment of an intercultural dialogue between Western medicine and the components of medicine that belong to each indigenous group, a dialogue that would permit complete and, above all, preventive care. In various cases in which distinct voices have been integrated, the results have been encouraging. In many mountain communities in Guerrero, traditional midwives have collaborated with Western medicine, a partnership which has resulted in an important decrease in maternal deaths—something which could not have been accomplished without the participation of traditional midwives.

With respect to education: so long as education remains centralized in the State, and the professors remain as its employees, the nationalist State practices will continue to be replicated within indigenous groups, and the indigenous student population will continue finding themselves in absurd situations like learning arithmetic in a language they do not speak and which no one has bothered to teach them before. Schools are the ideological bastions of the State and, in this sense, the creation of community schools belonging to indigenous groups is urgent. While private schools in urban contexts with avant-garde educational plans are tolerated and applauded, the State has not been able to create adequate educational responses for the indigenous peoples. In a desirable scenario, every indigenous community would manage its own early education and collaborate with the other communities to manage higher education. Every community would be able to hire their professors, establish guidelines for teaching methods and content, and even publish of their own textbooks and educational materials. It seems far fetched, but it was possible many years ago. In the first half of the 20th century, in the northern mountains of Oaxaca, indigenous communities hired and paid the professors at the municipal schools themselves. Though with the passage of time the State has left less space for community intervention in matters of education, it is still

possible to construct our own indigenous education systems.

In conclusion, the community institutions created by indigenous peoples not only need to resist the State's onslaughts, but must also seize more of its functions. The first step to achieving that is dismantling the nationalist practices that has us believing that we must not question the role of the State in the creation of the conditions under which we, indigenous peoples, currently live. Maybe in this way, taking apart the imaginary that makes the Mexican State a "unique and indivisible nation," we could finally build an "Us without Mexico." Maybe in this way we could be Mixes, Raramuris, or Purépechas, and no longer indigenous. Nations of the world without States, all of us.

*Translated from Spanish by Yoán Moreno