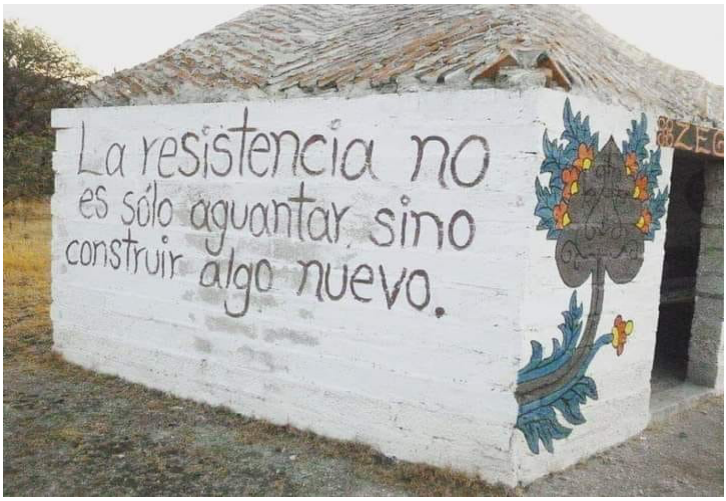
Resistance

Marc Georges Klein[1]



"Resistance is not just about enduring, it's about building something new." (*Chiapas, Mexico, 2021)*

Abstract

These pages would never have been written if I had not been able to settle in Chiapas in 2005, a state in south-eastern Mexico bordering Guatemala, where I discovered both the extraordinary richness of Mayan culture, past and present, and the intolerable situation endured by indigenous communities in this region, as in so many others in Abya Yala (the Kuna language term for the shamefully misnamed "Latin America"). Indigenous communities, oppressed for five centuries and still condemned today to "assimilate" (i.e., to renounce their identity) in order to have any chance of escaping discrimination, marginalisation and poverty. They are essentially based on two chapters of my book LES CLEFS DES CHAMPS. CAHIER D'UN RETOUR AU JARDIN ORIGINAIRE (2025, unpublished).

Keywords: *Mayan culture; indigenous communities; assimilation and identity; marginalization and poverty; Chiapas / Abya Yala.*

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[1] Marc Georges Klein, a theorist-practitioner of an original line of physical theatre, director, trainer, and writer, has participated in multiple creative training adventures in more than twelve countries, and published three books and more than thirty articles. Established in the Mexican state of Chiapas in 2005, he currently resides in Michoacán, where he has directed various independent theatre creation exercises in recent years.

1. The Epistemology of Modernity

Following Michel Foucault (1), I understand *the episteme* of a given era-culture to be the general axiomatic framework and the implicit and explicit codes that determine the way of seeing, think, feel and experience the world within that era-culture, and govern the symbolic practices that develop within it (practices that include the various languages and systems of interpretation of any experience, and, therefore, the production, legitimisation and transmission of any form of knowledge or meaning). This general framework imposes itself on subjects in an uncritical manner and determines the value of 'truth' as a certain effect of power; it is very difficult for any subject to conceive of anything in a form that would contravene the episteme of the era in which their way of feeling and thinking is immersed, and even more difficult to understand a cultural practice governed by the episteme of a foreign era-culture, as evidenced by the mutual astonishment experienced by the Spanish invaders and the indigenous peoples of Abya Yala, whose first contact constituted, rather than a "clash of cultures", a (tragic) *epistemic misunderstanding.*

The terms *episteme* and *epistemic* thus apply at a much deeper and more fundamental level than the terms *epistemology* and *epistemological*, which concern only the principles and conditions d for the production and validation *of a certain type of knowledge* through specific practices known as 'scientific': in other words, the term "epistemological" itself only has meaning within the framework of *Western* episteme, due to the separation of principle that it establishes between these practices and those that are "non-scientific" (and therefore do not produce any valid knowledge) – a separation that is meaningless in the context of non-Western episteme. The essential challenge that intercultural relations present to human intelligence is precisely that of being able to conceive and establish inter-epistemic relations that are not biased by the categories of a particular episteme, i.e. of being able to adopt a *meta-epistemic* point of view that recognises and values the diversity of cultural forms based on the diversity of the epistemes that govern them.

It is clear that the colonial domination of Europe (or more broadly of the West) is characterised, among other things, by the absence of such a viewpoint, i.e. by the imposition by the dominant powers of their own epistemic framework on the social and cultural forms of existence and representation of the dominated peoples and territories. This imposition takes place first and foremost through language and an obsession with renaming these peoples and territories, without the slightest concern for historical accuracy (or even intellectual honesty). However, it goes beyond the purely linguistic level: there is no doubt that for five centuries, the "Indian" peoples, originally from "Latin America" or the "New World" (sic), were forced, for their own survival, to feel, think and act according

to Western paradigms, including through their own language and culture. *Epistemic disobedience* therefore consists, first of all, for a formerly colonised people, in the effort to free their ways of perceiving, representing, thinking and constructing reality from the framework imposed by the colonisers and their heirs – and, secondly, in the (even more difficult) effort to try to free the latter as well...

But what exactly is this framework from which we must free ourselves?

In its broadest sense, the term *modernity* refers to the episteme of a historically determined period: that which saw the transformation of feudal society into industrial society in Europe between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. This does not refer strictly speaking to the origins of capitalism, which emerged during the (equally misnamed) "Middle Ages" with the gradual formation of a merchant and financial bourgeoisie, but rather to its conversion into the dominant system following the revolution in modes of production. It is characterised by the establishment of a type of socio-economic relations based on the massive exploitation and transformation of natural resources, wage labour (and consequently the formation of a proletarian class), the strengthening of the nation-state and the creation of multiple political-administrative-ideological apparatuses, serving the new social order and designed to control ever more aspects of daily life ever more closely, as illustrated in Charles Chaplin's 1936 film aptly titled *Modern Times*. During the same period, major emancipatory projects emerged (such as the admirable efforts of the Encyclopaedists in the eighteenth century) or transformative projects (such as the various forms of socialism or the communist movement in the nineteenth century), which sought to overcome this alienating order, while remaining within the same epistemic framework.

As an episteme distinct, for example, from that of the 'classical' era, modernity is characterised by the emergence of the 'subject' (individual rather than social or collective), separated from both the natural and divine orders, as the foundation of all consciousness, and the joint triumph of philosophical rationalism and scientific positivism, as a claim to base all efficient action on knowledge, and to found this on the value of 'truth', considering 'reality' as a set of data, phenomena, circumstances and processes that are fully knowable and controllable. This is where the terms 'development', 'growth' and 'progress' originate, as expressions of a belief (real or feigned, but in any case perfectly irrational) in the constant improvement of the human condition based on the principles of rationalised technical efficiency, considering 'nature' as an unlimited reserve of resources, placed there for all eternity by a decidedly philanthropic destiny at the service of humanity.

The question of whether we are still in the modern era has been controversial for several decades. According to various authors, we have entered, at least in the West – whether since the fall of the Berlin Wall, since Hiroshima and Auschwitz, or already since the First World War – a *postmodern* era, characterised by the failure of all rational projects for social improvement, the collapse of

major positive ideologies, widespread doubt about any systematic or systematising perspective, suspicion of the illusions of progress, the breakdown of the concept of truth and of all ethical and moral principles, and the withdrawal and confinement of individuals into an 'empty' existence based on individual consumption and addiction to simulacra (2) (3). However, for many of our contemporaries, at least as a horizon of hope (or is it illusion?), the virtues or supposed benefits conveyed by the discourse of modernity: a humanist perspective, the autonomy of the thinking subject, individual and social freedom, the overcoming of inherited prejudices, the pre-eminence of knowledge over ignorance and reason over superstition, secularism, tolerance, democratic social organisation, the recognition of fundamental human rights guaranteed by public authorities...

However, it is impossible today to share these positive perspectives. Indeed:

a) not content with having perpetrated the worst genocides in human history, producing and multiplying weapons of mass destruction, and dramatically worsening inequalities in living conditions between humans, the modern era has developed, with blind frenzy, the exploitation of natural resources and the contamination of our environment, to the point of seriously endangering the vital balances on the planet;

b) the values connoted by the discourse of modernity, starting with individual freedom, have always been trampled on or reduced to a bare minimum by the systems of power established in their name, whether under capitalist or (supposedly) communist economic regimes; the modern era is one of massive ideological impostures and the most criminal forms of economic and political imperialism: that of the Big Brotherisation of the world;

and c) modernity, as a historical project, has been inseparable, since its origins and throughout its successive stages, from the colonisation of the Earth's land and sea surfaces by European and then more broadly "Western" powers. In this sense, it is characterised by the imposition of a single model of "civilisation" on all human beings. Despite its proven inability to meet the needs of the majority of them, and the evidence of its truly anti-human dimension, this deadly model continues to expand its economic, political, ideological and cultural domination of the planet in the form of neo-(il) liberal capital-totalitarianism. This is an unprecedented situation of war against humanity itself, which requires radical resistance from the peoples of the world.

2. Coloniality

The days when the other existed are gone. The other as mystery, the other as seduction, the other as eros, the other as desire, the other as hell, the other as pain is disappearing. Byung-Chul-Han (4)

It is therefore not a clash of civilisations, but an almost anthropological

confrontation between an undifferentiated universal culture and everything that, in any field whatsoever, retains something of an irreducible otherness. For the world power, which is just as fundamentalist as religious orthodoxy, all different and singular forms are heresies... The mission of the West (or rather the former West, since it has long since lost its own values) is to subject multiple cultures by any means necessary to the ferocious law of equivalence. Jean Baudrillard (5)

One might be tempted to believe, particularly in Abya Yala, that the terms *colon*, *colony* and *colonise* come from the very name of the sinister Colombo, or *Colón* in Spanish, who, judging by his first name, was supposed to be a bearer of Christ, but who discovered neither one nor several "Indies", nor any "America", nor the slightest "New World", but who did indeed inaugurate, on 12 October 1492, on the island of Guanahani, a horrific series of mass crimes whose memory still haunts the peoples. However, this is only a grim coincidence: they come from the peaceful Latin word *colonus*, from *colere*, 'to cultivate', 'to inhabit'. In this sense, colonising a territory (supposedly virgin and uninhabited) means, first and foremost, for a determined group of people, settling there with a view to cultivating it. History teaches us, however, that in all circumstances this first, seemingly harmless step is sooner or later followed, as greed awakens and the territory in question appears to be unfortunately inhabited by some obviously uncultured and savage indigenous people, by a second step: the appropriation-annexation of the said territory in the name of the nation-state, now converted into a "colonial power", from which the colonists proceed, then a third: the systematic plundering of the colony's resources, accompanied by economic, social, sexual, political, religious and cultural enslavement, even the extermination of colonised peoples, and finally a fourth: the eventual creation of a mixed-race population, the product of the mass rape of colonised women by the colonisers, a population that becomes, if not the majority, at least a hegemonic minority.

To speak of *decolonisation*, then, is to evoke the (generally turbulent) historical processes by which a colonised population frees itself from the yoke of colonial power, proclaiming itself an independent nation and appropriating state power, whether by the dominant mixed-race group (as in Mexico in 1821), the non-mixed-race minority of colonists' descendants (as in South Africa in 1910) or the indigenous population (as in Algeria in 1962), with varying consequences for other categories of the population in each case (e.g. the establishment of a form of *internal colonialism* based on segregation). This liberation in no way prevented the maintenance of various "privileged " (or, to put it bluntly, perverse) ties with the former colonial power, which can go as far as the establishment of new forms of dependence, either a relationship of *neo-colonial* control, essentially economic in nature, as is the case in today's world system (6) of various "developing" countries in the global South, effectively strangled by "development aid" policies and other "free trade agreements" imposed by the "developed" countries of the global North.

But there is a form of control that is even more subtle and pernicious than the economic one, which persists, in various forms, in the minds not only of the formerly colonised, but also of the former colonisers: a control that can be described, in the broad sense of the term, as ideological, and which we will call *coloniality* to distinguish it from colonial (or neo-colonial) relations proper. For various authors from Abya Yala, the term refers to 'the hidden face of modernity', i.e. the persistence, despite decolonisation, of a hierarchical racial, sexual, economic and epistemic matrix, through which the distinction between Westerners and non-Westerners and the negation of otherness are continually manifested (7). Coloniality, understood in this way, encompasses, more precisely:

a) a pattern of economic and social relations of domination, oppression and exploitation, consubstantial with the capitalist order and the episteme of modernity, historically developed with the colonisation of much of the planet by Europe;

b) an ideological system of justification for colonial oppression, combining various seemingly heterogeneous components (Christian theological absolutism, the "humanist" conception of man as master of the planet, the hierarchical classification of cultures or civilisations according to a teleological line of 'progress', that of peoples according to criteria of race, gender or other factors, the postulation of the universality of Western rationality, the positivist affirmation of the pre-eminence of science and technology as factors of 'development', etc.);

and c) a set of mechanisms of alienation affecting various historical "subjects", both among ex-colonised populations and among ex-colonisers, which persist within the globalised capitalist empire as effects of the internalisation of the Western cultural model (such as the sexist-patriarchal model, the imposition of state power over nations and peoples, the myth of "development", the obsession with productivity, extractivism and consumerism, etc.).

However, it must be understood that if these forms of coloniality continue today – despite countless proofs of their irrationality, unjustifiability and harmfulness – to operate in such an effectively deadly manner, it is not because they are remnants, sequelae or residual consequences of historical processes of colonisation, skilfully recycled by neoliberal totalitarianism, but *because they constitute, on both a conscious and unconscious level, the very epistemic foundation of all colonial enterprise.* For – to take the case of Abya Yala – Cristóbal Colón and his horde of brutes did not encounter the 'savage' man (*homo sylvestris* or man of the woods) when they arrived on this continent: they themselves introduced him as the pure product of their primal nightmares, as we see him sculpted, hairy, bearded and armed with a mace, on the façade of the *Casa de los Montejo* in Mérida, in the Mexican state of Yucatán.

Indeed, as Roger Bartra notes, "Civilised man has not taken a single step without being accompanied by his shadow, the savage. It is a widely recognised fact that the identity of the civilised has always been flanked by the image of the

Other; but it was believed that the imagery of the Other as a savage and barbaric being – the counterpoint to Western man – was a reflection, more or less distorted, of non-Western populations, a Eurocentric expression of colonial expansion elaborating an exotic and racist version of the men whom the conquerors and colonisers encountered and subjugated. I claim, on the contrary, to demonstrate that European culture generated an idea of the savage man long before the great colonial expansion, an idea shaped independently of contact with strange/foreign human groups on other continents. I also want to demonstrate that savage men are a European invention that essentially obeys the internal nature- of Western culture. To put it bluntly: the savage is a European man, and the notion of savagery was applied to non-European peoples as a transposition of a perfectly structured myth whose nature can only be understood as an element of Western evolution" (8).

For my part, I would like to go one step further and put forward the hypothesis that this "image of the Other" – this archetypal shadow marked, to use Freud's expression, by an "uncanny strangeness", which, according to Bartra, has

for centuries obsessed the consciousness (or is it the unconscious?) of the Western Subject as the inhibited but forever impossible to annihilate figure of its own wild parent, or, in the words of Tzvetan Todorov, this "problem of the other " (9), *cannot be reduced* to an "idea", an "invention" or a "perfectly structured myth", but is something much deeper and more disturbing, which escapes the rationality suggested by these terms: something like the unthought-unthinkable iceberg of which they are only the tip; something that brings into play not *otherness* but *otherness*.

Taking into account both the neutral pronoun *Es* applied by Sigmund Freud to the archaic drives that spring from the depths of the Unconscious – "Wo Es war soll Ich werden" (10) – and Arthur Rimbaud's formula: "I *is* another", and Jacques Lacan's distinction between "the little other" and "the big Other" (11), I will venture, in order to distinguish it radically from what is commonly called *the alter ego*, to designate this instance as *the Ç'Autre*.

The alter ego would be the intimate but external enemy that the ego encounters in its mirror, that is, an image of itself: whether it likes it or not, it cannot avoid recognising it, as happens to Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson* (12), as its counterpart, its double, even its twin brother; if it must confront it, it will be in a fair, chivalrous fight, using the same weapons and respecting the same rules; and if it defeats it, it will not hesitate to deliver its eulogy: such is the paradigm that has governed the "noble" wars between the French and English cavalries for centuries.

The *Other*, on the other hand, cannot be assimilated through any form of identification; it has no face, no voice, no form; otherness is the name of a radical alterity, a vortex that pierces the being and ruins the entire imaginary scaffolding of the 'subject', the 'self' and/or the 'ego', that is, identity. It is an entity infinitely more terrifying than the (representable) wild man of the Casa de los Montejo, or Robert Louis Stevenson's (describable) Mister Hyde (13): not an *He* but an unrepresentable, indescribable and unfathomable *Ç*, to which none of the categories available to our language can be applied. In this sense, rather than "the figure of the other", we speak of what is always both hidden and manifested through it: *the in-figure of Ç'Autre*.

The hypothesis of otherness understood in this way may help us to understand something about the truly "savage" cruelty exercised in many forms (notably torture under the pretext of religion) by the self-appointed *Conquistadores* towards the "other" peoples they conquered: this senseless rage, which, as Hans Koning (14) points out, was counterproductive from the point of view of the colonial power's interests. And, as a result, to understand something of what persists today, particularly between the countries of the 'global North' and those of the 'global South' (15), but also within the latter, of coloniality – and to gauge the extent to which this phenomenon *goes* far *beyond* the supposed economic 'rationality' of globalised capitalist imperialism. It is important to understand that the

core of any 'civilising' colonial enterprise, beyond (*and sometimes even contrary* to) its material objectives and interests, which are easily discernible beneath the mask, is, in whatever form it takes, the obsession *with annihilating*, if not the very existence of the minds, bodies, resources and territories "other" than those it crushes, then at least their essential mark of infamy: *the various forms of diversity* that this existence is likely to present. Thus, according to its criteria, elements (both human and non-human) that are unusable or unproductive are condemned to marginalisation or exclusion, just as hundreds of forms of animal and plant life and thousands of languages and cultures of "minority" peoples, i.e. the vast majority of oppressed peoples, are condemned to extinction.

It may be useful to return to the etymology of the word to shed light on the rich meaning of *the word diversity*, which in everyday language encompasses connotations of *abundance*, *multiplicity*, *difference/difference*, *variety*, and *divergence* or even *opposition*. The words , Latin *diversitas* and *diversus* derive from the verb *divertere* ("to turn in the opposite direction", "to move away", "to separate"), the prefix *di-* marking duplication, opposition, but also origin and/or extension, and the root *vertere* meaning "to turn " - suggesting the principle of a way of life based, so to speak, on non-compliance with the initial model, principle, programme, guideline, code or paradigm: a mode of growth (or decline?) that is transgressive, unexpected, rhizomatic.

To claim, in all areas and dimensions of human experience, to impose uniqueness-sameness-uniformity-rectitude against all forms of multiplicity-diversity-deformity-aberration, such is the archetypal colonial obsession (and today, in its "neoliberal" version, more devastating than ever) of domination of the Singular Self over the Plural Other(s), i.e. the eradication of all supposed disorders of *poly-logism* under the absolute order of *mono-logism*. This is nothing less than a terrorist logic, and specifically *orthoterrorism*, whose fields of application are innumerable. Orthoterrorists include the "holy wars" of monotheisms against polytheisms identified with pagan and/or satanic practices, the hegemony of one official language and culture over others reduced to the status of "dialects" or "local customs and traditions", the imposition of a single nation-state on a diversity of peoples converted into masses of "citizens", the normative definition of supposed "human rights" from the perspective of a universal-individual-abstract Subject, disregarding real historical-geographical subjectivities and the collective rights of communities, or the domination of a monogeneric and monosexual patriarchal model over the plurality of possible gender-sexual individuations. Orthoterrorist any process, discourse, or practice which, when applied to any object, claims to provide a unilateral, univocal, and intangible interpretation, standardisation, or model, and imposes it as the only valid one. Orthoterrorist: any claim to subject the empirical plurality of modes of expression, meaning and communication to the dictatorship of a pre-formatted code, style or register. Orthoterror-

ist is the arrogant privilege of Cartesian, technical-scientific and instrumental "rationality" over all other possible modes of connection and interaction between humanity and its environment and with itself. Orthoterrorist the linear and metonymic mono-logical domination of sequentiality, as a principle of connection, over the spatial and metaphorical poly-logics of simultaneity. Orthoterrorists are all "classical" aesthetics in their condemnation of baroque (i.e. irregular) forms, all the canons of "doing well" or "speaking well" in their rejection of plebeian and vulgar practices, all Academies and Grammars in their obsession with policing the creative vitality of languages.And no less orthoterrorist is the imposition of a mode of agricultural production based on monoculture, denying the millennial experience of polyculture developed by the peasant peoples of the planet.

And if coloniality, as the original pattern (or metaparadigm) of the reduction-assimilation of the 'savage' to the 'civilised', manifests itself fundamentally in the obsession with eradicating diversity in all its dimensions and forms, a decolonial, or rather *decolonising*, practice-thought will be, above all, a practice-thought that values, defends, promotes and propagates *diversity in its broadest sense* – thus contributing to (re)building, as proposed by the Zapatista insurgent communities of Chiapas, *a world where many worlds can coexist*.

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