Emmanuel Levinas, Enrique Dussel, and *La Escuelita Zapatista*: Responding to the Ethics of Alterity

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Abstract

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The focus of my dissertation is the 'problem of the Other.' The central question is: how does one relate to the other without immediately taking away their alterity? If the Other is an absolute other, how can we relate in a way that is respectful and ethical? There are many examples of relationships among people that demonstrate ways that are ethical and ways that are not. I will be analyzing modernity/coloniality to understand in which ways this historical epoch demonstrated a lack of understanding of the Latin American Other. Afterward, I will offer a glimpse into the world of the Zapatistas and an educational experiment they called *La Escuelita Zapatista*. By undertaking close readings of Zapatista narratives, I hope to offer the reader an opportunity to identify the ethicality (or what I will call 'ethicity') of the Zapatistas' pedagogy.

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Dedication

To Gustavo Esteva, my mentor, my inspiration and my friend. Thank you for inheriting me your courage, your papers on education, and your passion for radical alternatives.

Introduction

I strive, along with many others who have re-envisioned themselves through a decolonial lens, to contribute to the creation of "*UN MUNDO DONDE QUEPAN TODOS LOS MUNDOS*" [a world wherein all worlds fit][1]. This phrase epitomizes the *ethos* of not one, but many contemporary movements that seek to bring the prevailing hierarchical injustices between different groups to the forefront of philosophical conversation and, at the same time, promote new ways of coexistence that are liberatory and ethical—thus transcending the modern[2] epistemological, ethical, and ontological hierarchy imposed by modernity/coloniality.

Though the domination of entire nations of Amerindians followed the 1492 collision of worlds, it is important to emphasize that there has always been resistance to and criticism of such conquest. This critique is and has been the central concern of Latin American philosophy and Decoloniality. As Latin America was strategically positioned as the Other to its European counterpart, understanding ourselves as the Other has moved us to write philosophy that is conscious of our colonial self, and of the value of accepting alterity without incurring domination. These considerations motivate me to contribute to our understanding of different cultures through a decolonial lens, based on Latin American philosophy of education and advocacy toward liberation, creating alternatives to existing hierarchical structures.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

[2] I align my understanding of modernity with that of Enrique Dussel and his work on the subject as it pertains to Decolonial Studies and what Dussel calls the *mito de la Modernidad* [myth of Modernity]. Dussel argues that modernity commences with the European invasion of the Americas and not with subsequent historical events in Europe, as most other authors would suggest. It is from 1492 onward that we can conceive of our world as a global (interconnected) system. Modernity is, hence, the historical time period when Europe established itself as the 'center' of this new global system and therefore claims dominance over all other cultures which will become Europe's periphery. See Enrique Dussel, *1492 : El encubrimiento del otro : Hacia el Origen del Mito de la Modernidad,* 1994.

The Focus of My Study and Thesis Statement

I have identified a few questions that guide my query: What is the 'problem of the Other'? Can interpersonal relations be ethical? Are relations between subjects possible—relations that are not based on power dynamics? Is it possible to respect and acknowledge the Other? In the words of Levinas, "How can a being enter a relation with the other without allowing its very self to be crushed by the other?"[3] Are there events—specifically educational events—deliberately designed with alterity in mind? Ultimately, I am putting into question the messianic tone of the Zapatistas: can a world wherein all worlds fit ever be?

Hence, my focus is set on the Other and the ethicity[4] of interactions. The 'problem of the Other' stems from radical alterity: the fact that the Other is absolutely other—and not in juxtaposition to the self, but concretely other in itself. Thus, the problem is that the relationship between subjects who are foreign to each other relies on behavior that promotes homogenization by one subject engulfing the other into itself. This move, dubbed totalization, turns intersubjective relations unethical and highlights their unethicity. By focusing on two different intersubjective instances (modernity/coloniality vis-a-vis the Zapatista movement, in particular, their *Escuelita*), I will highlight relations of unethicity and ethicity.

By writing this document, I strive to contribute to decolonial thought and philosophy of education 'otherwise.' I hope to create a piece that promotes liberation from colonization and which can help reclaim 500 years of colonial repression by acknowledging the voices of those

[3] Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other. Translated by Richard A. Cohen* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 2008) 77.

[4] It is more common to use the word 'ethicality' for the concept I am employing here. However, in my second chapter, I use the word ethicity rather than ethicality as a nod to Enrique Dussel, who uses the word "eticitidad" in his works. will offer an in depth explanation of the idea of *eticidad*. For now, I will just assert that my definition of ethicity is the ethical quality of a situation, reality, or behavior.

who opposed it yesterday, and who oppose it today and every day around the continent. For hundreds of years, we (subjected to coloniality) have not only been staring at our shackles: we have written, we have critiqued, we have fought, and we have resisted. And, during all these years, we have created other ways, alternatives that are radical not only because they are different from the center, but because they are essentially ours.

My thesis for this dissertation expresses my most humble respect for the alterity of the Other. It also expresses my deepest desire for a world where radical and alternative enactments of ethicity demonstrate that respect. For such a situation to take place, I believe it is necessary to identify those relational strategies we should move away from and the instances where ethicity is central to intersubjectivity. Hence, I articulate the following thesis, which is twofold:

(1) Modernity/coloniality is an example of approaching the problem of alterity by totalizing the Other into the same. However, (2) there are radical and alternative approaches that are being enacted around the world today, that display ethicity towards the Other in their alterity.

My intent is to re-envision Latin American reality, as well as identify educational alternatives in Latin America. In particular, I wish to learn how the Zapatista movement can contribute to our understanding of ethics and ponder if it is the intentional enactment of philosophical premises. The Zapatistas' *Escuelita* is not inherently ethical, but rather it is the enactment of a pedagogy that responds directly to the postcolonial critiques of modernity/coloniality and is possibly based on contemporary philosophical notions. The *Escuelita*, is a pedagogical experiment that emerges at a time when other pedagogical movements in the area are also creating the conditions for rethinking educational possibilities for ancestral peoples. These new pedagogies arise from intense critical thinking on behalf of those

designing them and are nourished by the traditional communal ways of the inhabitants of the southern states of Mexico.[5]

Preliminary Background

I will start putting my research into context by offering preliminary background information. To do so, I will first describe the modernity/coloniality working group. This group created the philosophical milieu to which I wish to contribute. Second, I will establish the link between Emmanuel Levinas' ethics as a first philosophy and Enrique Dussel's ethics of liberation. Lastly, I will entertain the possibility that Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos (now known as Galeano[6]), who strongly helped shape the Zapatista movement, was and is highly influenced by contemporary philosophy.

It is important to recognize the particular movement of ideas and theories that serve as the basis of this dissertation. This movement is a complicated dance that includes the presence of Emmanuel Levinas, Enrique Dussel, and Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos. Though at first sight, they might be perceived as disconnected, they are indeed intimately related. Succinctly, Levinas' ethics have immensely influenced Enrique Dussel. At the same time, (1) Subcomandante Marcos' intellectual history demonstrates a deep understanding of contemporary philosophy and (2) the involvement of intellectuals with the Zapatista movement shows a

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[5] See for example the "*Modelo Curricular de Educación Intercultural Bilingue UNEM"* and the "*Currículum para la Educación Primaria Intercultural y Bilingue ECIDEA"* in María Bertely Busquets, *Sembrando Nuestra Educación Intercultural Como Derecho: Diálogos, Experiencias y Modelos Educativos De Dos Organizaciones Indígenas Del Estado De Chiapas* (México: UNEM, 2009); and the *"Método Inductivo Intercultural (MII) en Una Escuela Primaria Indígena de los Altos de Chiapas" in Stefano Claudio Sortello, María, and Rosendo, "Desarrollo Curricular y Metodologías Con y Para Los Pueblos Indígenas," in Educación, Pueblos indígenas e Interculturalidad En américa Latina (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2015).*

[6] During the month of May in 2014, Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos spoke for the last time as himself and gave a short speech, bidding goodbye to this persona. He explains that the initial bid for revolution via war had ended. Instead, the Zapatistas worked arduously to foment a cultural movement that built schools and hospitals. Thus, he chose to let Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos go and become Galeano—the name of a fallen teacher. For the complete speech, see Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, "ENTRE LA LUZ Y LA SOMBRA," Enlace Zapatista, May 25, 2014, https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2014/05/25/entre-la-luz-y-la-sombra/.

symbiotic relationship that encourages the permeation of ideas (in particular the Zapatistas connection to Luis Villoro—a translator of minor work of Levinas; as well as the Zapatistas acquaintance with Enrique Dussel).

The modernity/coloniality working group featuring Enrique Dussel

The modernity/coloniality working group is a multidisciplinary and multigenerational collective of intellectuals who work in the US and Latin America, and are greatly influenced by Critical Theory. Their central concern is the elaboration "of a new interpretation of Modernity, globality, and difference."[7] The modernity/coloniality working group strives to understand and interpret the happenings of the last 500 years on Latin American soil. The cohesiveness of the collective is centered on their common topic of study and interpretation of coloniality as the underbelly of modernity.

Participants in the group include sociologists, semiologists, pedagogues, anthropologists, literary critics, and philosophers. Enrique Dussel (philosopher), Aníbal Quijano (sociologist), and Walter D. Mignolo (semiologist) can be considered its founding figures, for they have provided the group with concepts central to their thought.[8] Building on the core ideas, we find the works of Santiago Castro-Gómez (Colombian philosopher), Arturo Escobar (Colombian anthropologist), Edgardo Lander (Venezuelan sociologist), Fernando Coronil (Venezuelan anthropologist), Nelson Maldonado Torres (Puertorican philosopher), Ramon Grosfoguel (Puertorican sociologist), and Catherine Walsh (North American linguist—pedagogue).[9] Nelson Maldonado Torres references the work of "a younger but not less illustrious generation of

[7] Arturo Escobar, "'Mundos y conocimientos de otro modo'. El programa de investigación de Modernidad/Colonialidad Latinoamericano," *Tabula Rasa* 1 (January 1, 2003), 51, https://doi.org/10.25058/20112742.n01.03.
[8] Damián Pachón Soto, "Nueva Perspectiva Filosófica En América Latina: El Grupo Modernidad/Colonialidad," *Ciencias Políticas* 5 (2008): 8–35, 11
[9] Ibid.

scholars"[10] who have contributed to the group and include, among others, Linda Martin Alcoff, Lewis Gordon, María Lugones, and Chela Sandoval.

As mentioned, central to this intellectual movement is the work of Enrique Dussel. The Argentine-Mexican philosopher takes up the topic of the Other, intellectually inherited to him by Emmanuel Levinas, in a deliberate attempt to continue ethics as a first philosophy. He intends to see this canon to fruition in his Ethics of Liberation. Emmanuel Levinas' work affords Dussel a framework for interpreting Latin American reality when positioned vis-a-vis European domination. Levinas theorizes that the central problem of alterity is the propensity to submit the Other to a process by which he will become 'the same.' This mechanism stems from our incapacity to comprehend and accept what is different. The Other is a complete being or entity within itself. In *América Latina Dependencia y Liberación*,[11] Dussel highlights the Amerindian cultures faced by the invading Europeans. This situation is offered as an example of different cultures that *were* complete on their own, that had a *mundo pleno,*[12] and yet, were interrupted by the foreign invasion. The Europeans could not fathom the Amerindian—their non-European ways were incomprehensible, and interpreted as poor, irrational, beastly, superstitious.[13] And hence, they were reduced to not-being: not-being human enough to take seriously. This interpretation gave Europeans permission to subjugate and eradicate their epistemologies, technologies, and worldview. "Thus commenced the introjection of Amerindian(s) … into the new colonial education system…"[14] Fortunately, Dussel proposes, there is an alternative way to

[10] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-Continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique—an Introduction," *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 2 (2011), 5, https://doi.org/10.5070/t412011805.
[11] Enrique Dussel, *América Latina : Dependencia Y Liberación* (Buenos Aires: Fernando García Cambeiro, 1973), 196, http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/clacso/otros/20111218045836/AMERICA_LATINA.pdf.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid,197.
[14] Enrique D Dussel and Linda Martín Alcoff, *Pedagogics of Liberation : A Latin American Philosophy of Education*, trans. David Backer and Cecilia Diego (Goleta, California: Punctum Books, 2019), 70.

manage alterity that does not entail domination and dismissal. This is the project of his *pedagógica,* creating face-to-face interactions that are based on mutual service and pedagogical love. Hence, when faced with the Other, alterity is understood as free and autonomous—both 'the same' and the Other learn from each other.[15]

Emmanuel Levinas

Levinas is a continental philosopher whose interest in the theme of "the Other" has developed into an ethic that has inspired many generations of thinkers after him. His thought is a collection of careful and critical reflections and developments on Husserl and Heidegger, in light of his experience of WWII and the postwar. His breakthrough piece, *Totality and Infinity*, focuses on relations between existents, the face-to-face encounter that should be the quintessential ethical act, and the horrific consequences of absorbing the Other into 'the same' as an act of annihilation through the practice of totalization.

Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos' Intellectual Biography

Levinas wrote a theory of ethics as a First Philosophy that serves as a framework for Enrique Dussel to elaborate his Ethics of Liberation. Levinas' ethics and Enrique Dussel's philosophical practice, along with other philosophical works produced in post-war continental philosophy, have been read, known, and possibly used by Subcomandante Marcos in the intellectual construction of the EZLN. Sub's intellectual biography could have been the sole focus of this dissertation. And, it is certainly my favorite finding. However, I will not elaborate on it in subsequent chapters, but wish to include it as the context for the dissertation. This is because I have realized that certain Zapatista practices are not accidental—they are consciously

[15] Ibid, 60 and 61.

constructed enactments of different ways of educating, alternatives based on philosophical theories, practiced in events like *La Escuelita Zapatista*.

Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, known most famously as Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, was a historical subject of his time—the circumstances that made up his life clearly influenced who he became. Born in Tampico, Tamaulipas, Mexico on June 19th, 1957, world renowned for his work as an indigenous ally, Rafale came into the world as part of a mestizo working-class family. He attended private school in his native Tampico, studying in religious Jesuit schools. To attend university, he moved to Mexico City and secured a space at the prestigious Facultad de Filosofía y Letras at UNAM. Upon completion of his undergraduate studies, he taught at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana. Before heading into the jungles of the Southeast in Mexico, he experienced life abroad in Spain, living in Barcelona and working at a department store.

Rafael grew up in a particularly important time for the Jesuit community that governed his school. The Jesuits promoted a movement that originated in Latin America, and was being gestated during the 60s. At its core, Liberation Theology was about answering the question: What is the relationship between salvation and the historical process of man's liberation?[16] It was said to be more of a new methodology rather than a new theology, and came about "as a critique of the social, political, and economic conditions of domination that plagued the continent."[17] This approach was prompted after the Second Vatican Council, an important internal process of

[16] "¿Qué Es La Teología De La Liberación?: Génesis y Consolidación," Inicio, accessed April 11, 2022, https://jesuitas.lat/noticias/1724-comunicado-de-la-cpal-provincia-centroamericana-y-ausjal-sobre-la-situacion-en-nicaragua.
[17] Ibid.

reform,[18] in addition to the integration of the social sciences into the intellectual milieu. According to Rafael Vizcaino:

> (Latin American) liberation theology put forth a critical analysis of poverty that encompassed the categories of economic exploitation and political domination. From this standpoint, liberation theologians saw in orthodox theologies an unspoken endorsement of the unjust status quo.[19]

According to Enrique Dussel, Liberation Theology is the first theology to use human sciences and Marxism in an instrumental way.[20] It is a critical discourse of theology.[21] It is not, however, only an intellectual reconception, but a call to go into the poorest communities with a cause and purpose. This is the movement that gave direction to the Jesuit schools, including Rafael Sebastian Gillén's school.

During his four years of undergraduate classes (from around 1976 to 1980), Rafael must have completed 49 subjects.[22] Of those subjects, the following were compulsory: (1) Introduction to Philosophy, (2) Techniques for Philosophical Inquiry, (3) Logic, (4) Ethics, (5) Aesthetics, (6) Philosophy in Mexico, (7) History of Philosophy: Presocratic to Plato, (8) History of Philosophy: Aristotle to Hellenism, (9) Knowledge Theory, (10) Logic II, (11) Ontology, (12) Metaphysics, (13) Philosophy of Science, (14) History of Philosophy: Middle Ages to Renaissance, (15) Pedagogical Matter, (16) Teaching Philosophy (*Didáctica de la Filosofía*), (17) History of Philosophy: XVII and XVIII Centuries, (18) Teaching practice (*Práctica Docente Dirigida*), (19) History of Philosophy: Kant to Hegel, (20) History of Philosophy: From Hegel to the present. In

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[18] Rafael Vizcaino, "Introduction: Learning Across Liberation Theologies," *Lápiz* 07 (2022): pp. 7-18, https://doi.org/https://www.lapes.org/_files/ugd/c3ccc5_29e3c81c7ab742fe94ac1fa622bff0d0.pdf?lang=es, 10.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Enrique Dussel, "Teología De La Liberación y Marxismo," in *Cuadernillos Americanos Nueva Época*, ed. Leopoldo Zea, 12th ed., vol. 6 (Mexico: Nueva Época, 1988), pp. 138-159, 159.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Facultad de Filosofía y Letras UNAM, "Boletín de La Facultad de Filosofía Y Letras" (Ciudad de México, 1976), 13.

addition, Rafael would have chosen 18 optative courses on topics that range from Philosophy of Education to Philosophy of Religion; as well as from monographic courses on Plato, German Philosophy, French Philosophy, Marxist Philosophy, or Hegelian Philosophy. His department offered seminars on Latin American ideology and Philosophy that he could have chosen to take as electives.

Rafael finished his undergraduate studies in 1980, majoring in Philosophy. His thesis was titled "*Filosofía y Educación" (prácticas discursivas y prácticas ideológicas) (sujeto y cambio históricos en libros de texto oficiales para la educación primaria en méxico)* ["Philosophy and Education" (discursive practices and ideological practices) (subject and object of historical change in the official elementary education textbooks in mexico)].[23] In the 130 page document, he displays an important command of political theories popular at the time: most notably Althusser and Foucault. He also demonstrated the ability to apply philosophical concepts to educational praxis.

By the time he had been through his course work, he must have been extremely well versed in philosophical topics—both historical and contemporary. The *FFyL* (*Facultad de Filosofía y Letras*) at *UNAM* in Mexico City was an intellectual hotspot. As evidenced in the *Boletines de Filosofía y Letras* of the mid to late 1970s, there was an intense production of knowledge in books and journals, conferences year-round, a robust and well-versed faculty, as well as notable invited faculty (Darcy Ribeiro, for example, was invited in 1975[24]). There was so much movement that I could fill an entire book with the intellectual work being done, but I'll only mention that Luis Villoro (who I will talk about shortly) and Esther Seligson—both faculty

[23] Rafael Sebastian Guillen Vicente, "Filosofía Y Educación (prácticas discursivas-prácticas ideológicas) (sujeto y cambio histórico en los libros de texto oficiales para la educación primaria en méxico)" (Undergraduate Thesis, 1980). Lack of capitalization if from the original.
[24] Facultad de Filosofía y Letras UNAM, "Boletín de La Facultad de Filosofía Y Letras," 22

members during the late 70s—were translating Levinas' work; and our future Latin American superstar (Enrique Dussel) was already lecturing on the topic of *Categorías interpretativas para una Filosofía Política Latinoamericana* [Interpretive Categories for a Latin American Philosophical Politics] at the graduate level.[25]

After his stay in Europe, Rafael made his way to the Jungla Lacandona. Chiapas is one of the states with the highest Indigenous populations (about 30% of the population), and racial tension here has run deep for hundreds of years. However, socioeconomic, cultural, demographic, and political-religious changes in the last three decades of the XX century promoted migration—not to the capital like the general trend—but inward.[26] This migration gave way to tensions between different groups.[27] Moreover, during the 70s, the state of Chiapas was a fertile ground for people who were interested in revolution—armed organizations with a leftist inclination.

In the early 1980s, Rafael decided to go to Chiapas to understand a central quandry: "*¿Cómo era posible que hubiera tanto en manos de tan pocos y hubiera tan poco en manos de tantos?"*[28] [How was it possible that there were so few with so much and so many with so little?] He chose Chiapas because the Indigenous peoples of that state held important political levels. He also chose Chiapas because there were important guerrilla movements situated there, whose objective was to reclaim their historical and political rights.[29] He maintains he was first 'hired' by a guerrilla group as a teacher.[30] In an interview in 1994 he says: "*En realidad, yo llegaba aquí*

[25] Ibid, 16
[26] See Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, Yvon Le Bot, and Maurice Najman, *El Sueño Zapatista : Entrevistas Con El Subcomandante Marcos, El Mayor Moisés Y El Comandante Tacho, Del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional ; [La Voz Del Subcomandante Desde La Selva Lacandona]* (Barcelona Plaza & Janés, 1997).
[27] Ibid.
[28] Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, "Entrevista con Carmen Castillo," *Contrahistorias. La Otra Mirada de Clío* 20 (October 1994): 59–65, 59, https://biblat.unam.mx/hevila/ContrahistoriasLaotramiradadeClio/2013/no20/6.pdf.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

a dar clases, porque sabía leer y escribir y sabía de historia, de historia en general, pero además de historia de México. Necesitaban alguien que alfabetizara, y al mismo tiempo diera historia de México." [In reality, I came here to teach, because I knew how to read and write and knew about history, about history in general, but also about Mexican history. They needed someone to teach reading and writing and, at the same time, Mexican history] Shortly after his arrival, however, he became more than 'the teacher,' and became a part of the group, doing what the group did. At that particular moment, the group was learning how to move within the mountains.[31]

Eventually, while working with this group, Marcos became heavily influenced by the local philosophies of indigenous inheritance. As he was immersed in this alternative world—a world that is philosophically and ideologically vastly different from his upbringing—he learned about their culture and ways of life. More importantly, he also experienced different ways of knowing and being. This knowledge of 'other ways' different from the center, enriched his relationship with the people of the region. Though he was no stranger to political and philosophical theories that analyze injustice, he then experienced living through the longstanding repression and injustice of the Indigenous peoples.

After living in the Lacandon Jungle and helping organize the EZLN's guerrilla for more or less 10 years, he was part of the important insurrection of 1994. Once the insurrection exploded onto the mainstream and was consolidated as a legitimate social movement, it became of interest to many intellectuals. Thus, Sub Marcos, as a Zapatista, established close relationships that encouraged the exchange of philosophical ideas. A relevant example is Luis Villoro Toranzo. Luis was a major contemporary Mexican philosopher, who helped found the *Grupo*

[31] Ibid.

Hiperión [Hyperion Group], was an ambassador to UNESCO, and a member of the *Consejo Constitutivo de Ciencias de la Presidencia de la República* [Constitutive Council of Sciences for the Presidency of the Republic]. Aligned with the EZLN ideologically, Luis Villoro not only wanted to learn about the Zapatistas and their rebellion: he wanted to join the ranks. And so he did. After some initial exchanges with Sub Marcos who tried to persuade him otherwise,[32] Villoro explained "Quiero entrarme de Zapatista"[33] [I want to enroll as a Zapatista]. Villoro took his enrollment seriously and, through the rest of his life, fulfilled his duty as a Zapatista: as a sentinel guarding the Zapatista periphery. It is thus that Sub Marcos and Villoro established a relationship.

After some time had passed, in the early months of 2011, these two men commenced an epistolary relationship on the relevant topic of ethics and politics at the request of the Zapatistas.[34] The dimensions of their exchanges were political and ethical—dimensions that Villoro knew very well as a philosopher who was extremely well acquainted with XX century French philosophy. He translated books and essays by a variety of French philosophers, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau Ponty, and Levinas. Though the titles Villoro translated of Levinas' work were minor, he did translate three of his essays from French to Spanish and published them in 1975 in a publication titled *México en la cultura*, a supplement to

[32] Ángeles Mariscal, "Militante Y Centinela Del EZLN, El Secreto Que Guardó Luis Villoro," Expansión, May 3, 2015, https://expansion.mx/nacional/2015/05/03/militante-y-centinela-del-ezln-el-secreto-que-guardo-luis-villoro.
[33] Ibid.
[34] See Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, "CARTA PRIMERA (Completa) Del SCI Marcos a Don Luis Villoro. Las 4 Partes Del Texto Apuntes Sobre Las Guerras, Inicio Del Intercambio Epistolar Sobre Ética Y Política. Enero-Febrero de 2011," Enlace Zapatista, March 9, 2011, https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2011/03/09/apuntes-sobre-las-guerras-carta-primera-completa-del-sci-marcos-a-don-luis-villoro-inicio-del-intercambio-epistolar-sobre-etica-y-politica-enero-febrero-de-2011/.

the Mexican newspaper *Novedades.*[35] The pieces translated were "Arte y crítica," "La realidad y su sombra," and "La plástica y el tiempo."[36]

Many other intellectuals have been impressed, interested, and interrelated with the project. However, I stressed the relationship between Luis Villoro and Sub Marcos because of Villoro's closeness to the Zapatista community. This is evidenced by the fact that the Zapatistas held an important event to commemorate his passing, and his wife left his ashes scattered near a tree in San Cristobal.[37] It is during another commemorative event that we are offered a glimpse into more relationships Marcos and the Zapatistas procured with Mexican, Latin American, and international intellectuals.[38] During the international colloquium in memoriam of Aundrés Aubry, titled "*Planeta Tierra: movimientos antisistémicos*" ["Planet Earth: Antisystemic Movements"], the Zapatistas invited and held seven collective conferences. Amongst those invited to present were Sylvia Marcos, Gustavo Esteva, Enrique Dussel, Jean Robert, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Jorge Alonso, and Gilberto Valdés.[39] In a "collective conference,"[40] held on Saturday, December 15th, 2007, Subcomandante Marcos was set to share the table with Enrique Dussel and Boaventura de Sousa Santos.[41] As Dussel recounts, Boaventura de Sousa Santos could not make it—but Dussel and Marcos did share the stage for deep and important dialogue.

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[35] According to Carlos Monsiváis, this cultural supplement in the *Novedades* newspaper represents the thought of an important generation of Mexican authors who offered insightful political critiques. See Carlos Monsiváis, "Proyecto de Periodización de Historia Cultural de México," *Texto Crítico* 2 (July 1975), 94, https://cdigital.uv.mx/handle/123456789/7232.

[36] As identified in his bibliography in Garzón ValdésErnesto, Alejandro Rossi, and SalmerónFernando, *Epistemología Y Cultura : En Torno a La Obra de Luis Villoro ; [Simposio Celebrado En México, D.F. Los Días 12 Y 13 de Noviembre de 1992]* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma De México, Instituto De Investigaciones Filosóficas, 1993), 364.

[37] Ángeles Mariscal, "Militante y Centinela Del EZLN," 2015.

[38]Enrique Dussel, "Agenda," Enrique Dussel, accessed March 10, 2022, https://enriquedussel.com/ag_25.html.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Zapateando, "Primer Coloquio Internacional in Memoriam Andés Aubry," November 26, 2007, https://zapateando.wordpress.com/2007/11/26/primer-coloquio-internacional-in-memoriam-andres-aubry.

[41] Ibid.

What is very impressive is that these conferences were a sequence of dialogues between the invited intellectuals and the sub. Marcos was able to successfully maintain intense philosophical discourse with some of Latin America's most prominent thinkers of the time. To me, this is evidence of his intellectual biography and years of experience in an alternative philosophical milieu.

The Absolute Other

There is an important jumping-off point, a premise, that underlies the development of my ideas in this dissertation. This premise is my understanding of a certain concept promoted by Emmanuel Levinas in his work. It is by no means something that I will be intending to prove, but rather, a presupposition that I take for granted to advance my ideas. In this sense, I am accepting its usefulness because of the authority of the one who bestows it upon me and with the intent of building upon it. Though I will dive deep into Levina's theory in Chapter One, there are a few points on 'alterity' I need to make very clear in advance.

Levinas' concept of the Other is stringent and firm. His view is a view I share and one I am excited to draw on. For Levinas, the Other is absolutely other: the Other (with a capital O) is *the* absolutely other.[42] The Other "can never be immanent or comprehended, (he is) namely, the other, who, as other is absolutely foreign."[43] Alterity is, thus, the "radical heterogeneity of the other."[44] The quintessential trait of the Other is absolute otherness. This is not a relational element. It is not to answer the binary of familiar/stranger or me/they. The Other is other in relation to no one. He is not other to me; he is other in that he is the only one to experience his

[42] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority. Translated by Alphonso Lingis.* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 197.
[43] Deborah Achtenberg writes this passage in the context of teaching and the characteristics of relationality needed in order to fulfill different ways of approaching teaching, those of Plato and Levinas. In *Essential Vulnerabilities: Plato and Levinas on Relations to the Other.* (Northwestern University Press, 2017), 114.
[44] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 36.

existence. Alterity is in him—it is not relative to me.[45] This trait makes him different. In the words of Levinas, "the Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign."[46] It is only ever possible to experience the other as Other. Even in the presence of the Other, he is absent, for there is no way to experience existence together.

I need to emphasize that this premise is not the hypothesis of my dissertation. I will not spend time arguing for or against it. Nor will I present evidence to convince anyone of this being true. What I need to establish is that I have structured my dissertation questions, hypothesis, and arguments on the basis that I give this conception of the Other value and chose to use it over all other possible conceptions available to me. Hence, I will work through the document as though this has already been established.

Though I wholeheartedly and intellectually agree with Levinas on this point, I would be remiss if I did not point out that there is criticism of his construction of the Other. Most importantly, Dussel is highly vocal about this difference between his and Levinas' concepts. For Dussel, the concept of the Other requires a relational component, one where there can be service[47] and commensuration (love for the other as other),[48] for if there is only absolute otherness then there can be no liberation. Dussel characterizes Levinas' Other as "*equívoco, es absolutamente incomprensible, es incomunicable, es irrecuperable, no puede liberárselo (salvarlo)*" [equivocal, absolutely incomprehensible, incommunicable, irrecuperable, unsavable.][49] For Dussel, since Levinas' concept is completely closed off, there cannot be the conditions necessary for the process of liberation. In the pages that follow, I part company with

[45] See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 121.
[46] Ibid, 212.
[47] Enrique Dussel and Daniel E. Guillot, *Liberación Latinoamericana Y Emmanuel Levinas.* (Buenos Aires: Bonum, 1975), 9.
[48] Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de La Liberación* (Bogotá: Editorial Nueva América, 1996), 83.
[49] Dussel and Guillot, *Liberación Latinoamericana y Emmanuel Levinas*, 9.

Dussel on this point, while fully comprehending why he and others might have such a response to Levinas' outlook.

Method of Inquiry

This document will first and foremost embody and manifest the *ethos* of Latin American Philosophy of Education which, as Eduardo Mendieta and Eduardo Duarte prescribe,[50] is essentially methodological. I believe that we cannot dissociate our intellectual writing from our personal story. And mine is a first-hand account of being a female Latin American embodied-Other in a hierarchy dominated by patriarchy and the global North. In a way, there is a peculiar aspect to the way Latin American philosophers and decolonial thinkers have been doing philosophy that comes from their own experience as subjects of domination. In a 2013 essay, Eduardo Duarte uses the term *fenomenología del originario* to describe Latin American self-reflection in light of European domination.[51] His *fenomenología del originario* is an invitation to ask ourselves: Where are we?[52] Where is Latin America in relation to power dynamics? Where am I (a Latin American woman) in relation to the powers that dominate my contemporary world? Most importantly, this question is not just a question to be answered from the academic armchairs at prestigious universities, but a question that has the potential to help liberate us as we are in the process of answering it. This movement from the global South is about implosion—it is an intellectual revolution that disrupts the established colonial way of being as abruptly as the Europeans who landed on American soil 500 years ago. Decolonial thought and Latin American

[50] See Eduardo Mendieta, "From Colonial to Decolonial Pedagogy: From Bello to Freire," ed. Cecilia Diego, *Lápiz* 01 (2104) 14-30; Eduardo Duarte, "What Is Latin American Philosophy of Education? La Fenomenología Del Originario," ed. Cecilia Diego, *Lápiz* 01 (2014): 94–109.
[51] Eduardo Duarte,"What is Latin American Philosophy of Education?" 102.
[52] Ibid.

Philosophy of Education are tools for those of us who strive to understand ourselves as colonial, while we are on our way to becoming decolonial.

Throughout my dissertation, I will be closely analyzing texts. I will carefully study and offer a summary of the key concepts Levinas develops related to the Other. I will also be studying the modernity/coloniality working group's understanding of modernity and coloniality as two sides of the same coin, and working toward an understanding of Enrique Dussel's view of relational dynamics between Europe in the center and Latin America as its original periphery. I will strive to understand the experience of Latin Americans as the Other and the resulting colonial consciousness that prevails.

Rethinking historical accounts is a method of liberation. Relating to this method, I will use every idea thought, and every word written as a contribution to a better understanding of power relations and ways to turn those hierarchical, universalizing institutions into ethical spaces for respectful coexistence. My baseline for this coexistence is the Zapatista: "*UN MUNDO DONDE QUEPAN MUCHOS MUNDOS."*

I will also be experimenting with different, non-totalizing ways of relating to educational realities enacted as movements or events in Latin America, specifically *La Escuelita Zapatista.* Initially, I had planned on utilizing *La Escuelita Zapatista* as a case study to exemplify a radical alternative to education. However, the more I studied Levinas, the modernity/coloniality working group, and Dussel, and the more I became acquainted with the epistemological and cosmological beliefs of the Zapatistas, the more it became clear to me that using them as an object of study is a move that goes against the core ideas I am promoting. Thus, I will experiment with a different way of presenting this content: my third chapter will be a long personal reflection on my knowledge of *La Escuelita Zapatista*. I will mimic the Zapatistas' way of writing, which is a

narration in the first person. In this way, I am not objectifying their movement or their struggle. I am relating to them in a way that positions them in the height—that positions them as my teachers. And, even though I was not able to secure a face-to-face with them, I am being as responsible as possible by not incurring in totalizing acts of intellectual domination.

Chapters

A degree in Philosophy and Education requires knowledge of both disciplines and the capacity to find spaces where these two intertwine. I have designed the body of this document with this in mind so I can showcase my knowledge, and versatility, but also my capacity to analyze and synthesize. The first chapter will be the most philosophical and theoretical. I will summarize and explain the core concepts of Levinas' ethics. Totalization, 'the same,' the Other, the self, infinity, the face-to-face, and the heights are all terminology to be discussed and understood before I move on to the next chapter. In the second chapter, I will trace how Enrique Dussel, as a part of the modernity/coloniality working group, inherited and promoted Levinas' Ethics; and using Dussel's thought, try to understand the treatment the Americas received from Europe. This treatment, I contend, is a clear example of unethicity. Lastly, I will inquire into the existence of an important event in Zapatista history: *The Escuelita Zapatista*. The last chapter will be the most pedagogical. I have designed the dissertation to go from the philosophical pole to the pedagogical pole. However, there are philosophical and educational precepts that drench each chapter, no matter what chapter it may be.

Chapter I: Emmanuel Levinas' Ethics and The Absolute Other

1.1 Radical Alterity: 'The same' is not the Other

I started conceiving the basic philosophical principles underlying my thesis statement with a clear inclination toward what Levinas suggested are Anti-Platonic Contemporary Philosophies of Meaning.[53] As an intellectual rebellion against universalized access to knowledge through the Greek *logos*, which establishes the logic of submission, decolonial theories, I thought, must then assert cultural diversity of meaning. Signification is not found within ourselves, as the Socratic approach goes; nor is it found outside of us in a world of ideas independent of those who think them. Meaning is created and is itself a cultural artifact.

If, as these contemporary theories suggest, "*there is no meaning in itself*,"[54] then meaning-making and sharing are also controversial. Gustavo Esteva claims the absurdity of intercultural relations. Meaning is made within a culture and renders cultures incomprehensible amongst each other.[55] We find ourselves shut up and shut out. So, if it isn't to help us communicate, what role do knowledge, meaning, and theory play in interpersonal and intercultural relations?

There is an epistemic problem at the root of decolonial theories—a problem of the primacy of knowledge. Authors and activists denounce the adoption of modern knowledge from the Global North, masquerading as universal in order to subordinate, discredit, and disappear all

[53] See Emmanuel Levinas, "Meaning and Sense," in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana, 1996), 42.
[54] Ibid.
[55] See Gustavo Esteva, *Desafíos de La Interculturalidad* (Breña: PRATEC - Proyecto Andiano de Tecnología Campesinas, 2017), 1–15, 3, http://tdh-latinoamerica.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Derechos-Ecol%C3%B3gicos-Andino-Pratec-Desaf%C3%ADos-de-la-interculturalidad.pdf.

others. As the cultures at the margins reclaim their beliefs and state their distance from the supremacy of the epistemology of the center, the question becomes one of hierarchy and power. Which knowledges are better at grasping reality? Should all knowledge be considered equal? Should we teach indigenous and ancestral knowledge at universities? Can they mix? Do they repel? How do we make sense of the diversity of meaning-making?

As I put forth my dissertation proposal and thesis, the questions I received from concerned committee members were quite similar to those above: Is it your claim that cultures are incommunicable? Are some cultures better at communication than others? The severity of my claim, that pronounced alterity as a stringent absolute otherness, was highlighted as a feature that needed much of my attention—especially if I was to rest my entire argument atop it. And thus, Levinas and his ethics become central. The path to Levinas led me closer and closer to the understanding of ethics as a first philosophy and its suggestive arguments that nourish XXI century Latin American philosophy and philosophy of liberation.

The questions raised to me are answered once we situate responsibility to the Other before ontology, thus moving away from the belief that "the intelligible is not conceivable outside of the becoming that suggests it."[56] The Other is absolutely other, and I will present this at length in the chapter. I was able to frame the basis of my dissertation with notions anterior to systems of meaning-making—those afforded to me by Levinas. And hence, the central pillar from which my thesis follows is that the Other is not 'the same,' but is an absolute other with whom I establish an ethical engagement prior to knowledge—which I must stress, is also prior to power and domination. This means that (a) there is an identity of 'the same' to itself that makes him independent from everyone else and (b) identifying ontology at the onset of philosophy

[56] Levinas, *Meaning and Sense*, 42.

promotes totalization of the Other into sameness, but ethics as a first philosophy promotes interpersonal relationships that are not based on meaning-making and recognize the presence of the Other as the interlocutor.

In what follows, I will detail how 'the same' and the Other are never to be conflated or otherwise become a totalization. I will explain in detail what totalization is and how it gives way to imperialism in different forms. Finally, I will dive deep into the meaning of ethical relations as examined by Levinas and end by answering the question of the possibility of interlocution amongst individuals who are other to each other. All in the hopes of establishing the underlying notions on which I based this dissertation, which as I said, is now far away from my initial thoughts aligned with conceptions of meaning-making in contemporary philosophy.

1.2 On 'the same'

To begin, I would like to point out that the correct question to ask when pondering 'the same' is "who is 'the same?" (vs. "what is 'the same"?) For 'the same' is not a characteristic of an existent, but the existent itself (him/herself): an existent with identity, with interiority, in isolation (separate) from the rest. 'The same' can be extended to a group of existents, who share a common identity and are individuated and separated from the Other, but as a group. Levinas' theory has this particularity: it applies to a single person as well as to the entire group as an individuated entity. 'The same' is one of the terms utilized by Levinas to talk about the I, or about that which holds one unique identity.

It is unlikely that I will be able to examine 'the same' without needing to rely heavily on its distinction from the Other, and vice versa. However, I must be careful not to mislead the reader into thinking that both 'the same' and the Other are parts of a shared category. Much to the contrary, Levinas opposes dialectical Hegelian views that would totalize 'the same' and the

Other into a single grouping.[57] In his own words: "If the same would be a part of a totality by simple opposition to the other, it would already be a totality encompassing the same and the other."[58]

In order to comprehend Levinas' proposition of ultimate otherness, it is necessary to recognize, as he does, that there are two different kinds of relationships amongst existents. This distinction will sustain the characteristic necessary to preclude totalization. On the one hand, we find transitive relationships, relationships where we 'are' with the Other through our senses of touch, smell, sight, hearing, and tasting; we may also be with the Other through sympathy or cooperative work.[59] All transitive relationships require exchange between those who engage in them. On the other hand, we find intransitive relationships, which are more complicated to explain. Intransitive relationships are those that require no exchange at all, and therefore, they can in no way totalize the participants. Intransitive relationships highlight our interior and separated individuation, for as Levinas writes: "one can exchange everything between beings except existence."[60] Thus, intransitivity is upheld between two (or more) existents who are precluded from experiencing each other's existence, because "existing (...) constitutes the absolutely intransitive element."[61] 'The same' is not the Other—"I am not the other"[62]—because existents do not share in existence. There is no common existence that animates us in unison.

Intransitivity between existents is constituted through identity, interiority, and solitude. In the following paragraphs, I will go into detail about each of the constituting spheres to better understand Levinas' stance on intransitivity and 'the same.'

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[57] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 38.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 42.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

Identity regards the self as identical to itself, and yet, it is not merely reducible to an A=A formulation.[63] Identity means I am myself and not another. The I of identity can be sensed in two directions. It can be intuited by looking outwards and recognizing there is an I and there is a world. Hence: "The other is what I myself am not."[64] The I may also be sensed by reaching inward: identity is synonymous with self-identification.[65] No matter if we look outward or inward, identity is not something that comes to us from the Other, imposed on us by some external force. We identify ourselves. Our identity dwells within us. That dwelling is exactly our identity: our inner home is our identity. To have an identity is to be at home within oneself: *chez soi*. 'The same' is made up, in part, by the concept of identity—'the same' identifies itself as the identity that remains 'the same.'

This is not to mean that there is no change in 'the same.' As Levinas writes: "The I is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existence consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout *all that happens to it*."[66] We have a primal identity that is the fruit of the primordial work of identification. There will inevitably be changes within 'the same,' but those are accidental—not primordial. We cannot become other to ourselves through change.

Interiority refers to the inner life cultivated through thought. "I think comes down to I am."[67] Interiority, inner life, is an event. It is the ongoing "event of being."[68] Our constant thoughts make up the event of being. Interiority takes place within the most intimate space of our

[63] See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 37.
[64] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 83.
[65] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 36.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid, 46.
[68] Ibid, 26.

being, our own thoughts, and thus, Levinas regards our inner life as "solitude par excellence."[69] The event of thinking itself is not shared with others. We can tell others what we think and we can share our thoughts, but the act of thinking is carried out by our individual self. Interiority, hence, ensures separation and reinforces identity, as there are no transitive actions taking place with others. It is completely independent of the Other in the sense that it is "absolutely closed over upon itself."[70] Though nobody will be able to concomitantly produce thinking with another, and though thoughts remain closed off by the barriers of our solitude, interiority forcibly needs to open onto others to receive the revelation of the Other (and vice versa to reveal itself). I will offer more insight into these 'revelations' in the pages that follow, it is necessary to mention this window or door that works by opening and closing interiority to the Other, for without it, interiority would never reveal intersubjectively. Interiority also helps us understand the concept of 'the same,' for 'the same' can be construed as an event—an event of existing through our thoughts that gives us continuity as cognitive beings but also delimits our relation to others in the intransitive nature of such activity.

Isolation (solitude or separation**)** underscores autonomy and independence of the self. We are one with ourselves, we are individuated from others by our materiality. Being isolated does not mean we are not around other people, it means we are separate beings who have a separate existence from those around us. Because of its isolated existence, a being owes nothing to others.[71] As separate existents, we are without transitivity in our expression. We 'are' because of our existence and not because of another's existence. We continue to exist because of our inseparable existent-existence dynamic that needs nothing from outside of it to continue to exist.

[69] Ibid, 118.
[70] Ibid, 148.
[71] Ibid, 60.

Concerning inner life, it is important to mention that our separation from others precedes it and not the other way around. Our thoughts are produced within ourselves because we are a self to begin with. Being a self already denotes separation. And hence, when these thoughts that make up inner life arise, my life, my existence, was already mine and only mine to begin with. No one has access to my inner life because the inner workings of my thoughts belong to my materiality and self.

"To be is to be isolated by existing."[72] 'The same' is the individuated being at home in itself[73] separated and closed off from others in its existence because of its existence. To have existence is the trait of an existent that does not share that existence but exists in itself because of it. Hence, 'the same' is the individual or the collective I—otherwise known as 'the ego.' 'The same' is interchangeable with the ego, even though, more correctly said, it is "the concreteness of egoism."[74] Egoism presupposes separation, or "insular sufficiency."[75] One of the ways our egoism is highlighted is by recognizing its enjoyment in happiness, for this enjoyment is personal, no other person will fill this happiness within himself/herself in unison with me. Ultimately, 'the same' and the ego—as individual people or collective peoples—are characterized by their intransitive quality manifested in their identity, interiority, and isolation.

1.3 On the Other

The central figure in Levinas' ethical theory is the Other. The Other is an existent. However, they are the existent, which I myself am not. Just like 'the same,' this existent has an identity, an interiority, and exists in isolation from the rest. The Other can be regarded as one

[72] Ibid, 42.
[73] Ibid, 147.
[74] Ibid, 38.
[75] Ibid, 216.

single person or a collection of people that share their identity—'the same'—with a particular group, but are separate from other such groups. The collective Other is just as important as the individual Other. The Other is one of the terms utilized by Levinas to talk about the infinite, the transcendent, and about ethical figures such as the stranger, the widow, and the orphan.

As mentioned before, 'the same' and the Other must not be construed as two components that make up one single totality. On the contrary, they are so completely other to each other, that Levinas erected an entire opus on their different existances. In what follows, I will discuss the traits of the Other as those of transcendence, infinity, alterity, and exteriority, in the hopes that the differentiation between 'the same' and the Other becomes clear.

The Other is someone I am not. I am 'the same' to myself, I identify with myself, but the Other is a being who possesses their own existence, and hence, we do not identify with each other as part of 'the same.' According to Levinas, the Other possesses "radical heterogeneity,"[76] for he is absolutely transcendent from me. Their existence and mine are intransitive to each other: they exist fully without any relation with me and vice-versa. As Levinas states, "the other is in no way another myself, participating with me in a common existence."[77] In possessing his own existence, the Other also possesses his exteriority or alterity. The Other's existence, his exteriority, his alterity, his presence face-to-face with another, makes palpable the infinite and the transcendent: in other words, the metaphysical. And it is our relation to the metaphysical as metaphysicians that renders us ethical beings.

To understand Levinas' metaphysics, and subsequently, his Ethics, I must unpack what the author means by transcendent, infinite, alterity, and exteriority. To be clear, he has a materialistic, concrete, and practical understanding of these terms. His novel approach to

[76] Ibid, 84.
[77] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 75.

philosophy, one that posits ethical praxis over ontological knowledge, finds genuine inspiration and grounding in the existence of the Other.

The term '**transcendence'** references that which lies outside the borders of my own existence. Because we are material beings, we are separate from each other; our body, our being, and our existence are closed off from the rest by the limits which give us individuality and identity. To be transcendent is to be other. To be transcendent is to be separate. To be transcendent is to be everything there is to be, except part of 'the same.' Transcendence "designates a relation with reality infinitely distant from my own reality."[78] Everything and everyone that can be found outside the confines of the I, of 'the same,' is a transcendent reality and, therefore, a reality that is absolutely other and cannot be experienced by anyone but the existent himself.

Infinity is everything that the Other is. The Other "overflows absolutely every idea I can have of him."[79] What the Other is, what he knows, and what he does transcends what I am, what I know, and what I do; what the Other is, what he knows, and what he does are infinite in the sense that there is no way for me to understand or experience it for myself. To transcend is to be other, but to be infinite is to be the "absolute other."[80] Infinity is one of the two key concepts that guide Levinas' work in the book *Totality and Infinity*. Infinity is the abundance of realities that exist independently of each other. Whereas totality is a system closed up in itself, independent and autonomous. The infinite is that which is undefinable by 'the same.' 'The same' has its clear boundaries in its individuality, but in separateness, we do not know the boundaries of the Other, the Other is undefinable. We cannot even begin to describe the Other, as we are forever

[78] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 41.
[79] Ibid*,* 87.
[80] Ibid*,* 49.

distanced by absolute otherness. The content of the Other has an incomprehensible number of possibilities to embody. Infinity "exceeds my power"[81] because I have no say in whatever goes on outside of me. As Sharon Todd points out. "there is more to being and existence than this image of totality; there is always an otherness to the sameness of identity that the I has constructed for itself."[82]

Alterity is absolute otherness. "The alterity of the other is ungraspable and unsatisfiable."[83] Alterity "appears as a nonreciprocal relationship."[84] To be another from the other is much more complex than just the fact that we are individuated human beings. Alterity references the "radical heterogeneity of the other."[85] What this means is that alterity belongs to or is found within the Other, as it is not relative to the I or 'the same' in any way, but completely independent (transcendent) from the rest. I am a completely autonomous being, and the other is also a completely autonomous being. Relations between autonomous beings are intransitive as one does not give anything to the Other nor does the Other need to be given anything. Intransitivity is based on the fact that each existent has his own existence, an existence that is not shared.

> It is banal to say we never exist in the singular. We are surrounded by beings and things with which we maintain relationships. Through sight, touch, sympathy, and cooperative work, we are with others. All these relationships are transitive: I touch an object, I see the other. But I *am* not the other. I am all alone. It is thus the being in me, the fact that I exist, my *existing*, that constitutes the absolutely intransitive element, something without intentionality or connection. One can exchange everything between beings except existing[86]

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[81] Ibid*,* 106.
[82] Sharon Todd, "Experiencing Change, Encountering the Unknown: An Education in 'Negative Capability' in Light of Buddhism and Levinas," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 49, no. 2 (May 2015): 240–54, 248, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12139.
[83] Alphonso Lingis, "Theoretical Paradox and Practical Dilemma," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 2004): 21–28, 24, https://doi.org/10.1080/0967255032000172128.
[84] Levinas, *Time and the Other,* 106.
[85] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 121.
[86] Ibid*,* 42.

Todd affirms that Levinas considered "alterity is neither the existential 'nothingness' of death, nor the psychoanalytic unconscious, but rather the absolutely irreducible otherness that always lies in an external relation to being; an otherwise than being..."[87] In another piece of writing, Todd highlights that "Levinas' work is pre-eminently about letting the otherness of the other be, without appropriating the other into frameworks of knowledge or understanding."[88]

Exteriority references our physical, bodily presence**.** Levinas explains that to manifest one's exteriority is "to posit oneself in (the world) corporeally.[89]" Our thoughts, which make up our interiority, are invisible; but our physical presence in the world, our body itself, is the marker of our existence and our attendance. To appear before another is to reveal ourselves through exteriority. That which is exterior can be seen, can be heard, can be perceived by sensory organs. We disclose our existence by our body's being within the material world. We appear before others not by manifesting interiority, but by being physically there—that presence is what Levinas construes as exteriority.

It is from the external dimension that we present ourselves as real, as true, as human, as others to those who surround us. It is because of the external dimension that we may engage with others in what Levinas dubs 'face to face.' First philosophy approaches the relationship amongst beings that stems from exteriority because it is the cause, the basis, and the only reason why the face-to-face is possible. This derives from the fact that interlocutors can only ever be outside each other. This reality follows from the I being identical to itself, with existence stemming only from itself, and the Other sharing no part of this identity or existence. Exteriority, presence,

[87] Sharon Todd, "Levinas and Education: The Question of Implication," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 22 (2003): 1–4, 2.
[88] Todd, "Experiencing Change, Encountering the Unknown: An Education in 'Negative Capability,'" 242.
[89] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 127.

embodiment, and proximity all relate to the "experiential character of interpersonal space."[90] As Todd writes, "According to Levinas, the fact of our embodiment and social situatedness are not neutral features of human reality, but instead, are affectively and ethically charged structures that knit us into living communities alongside other bodily subjects."[91]

After analyzing the dimensions of 'the same' (identity, interiority, and isolation) and the Other (transcendence, infinity, alterity, and exteriority), it is the correct moment to introduce Levinas' conception of metaphysics, ethics, and why these should be a first philosophy—and why ontology follows from these and not the other way around.

1.4 On Totalization of the Other

I have established the principal differences that constitute 'the same' and the Other, and have already highlighted that they do not work together as thesis-antithesis in a Hegelian sense. For Levinas, there is no philosophical model that would permit the grouping of both concepts and still allow each to remain radically Other. Levinas clearly states: "If the same would establish identity by simple *opposition to the other*, it would already be a part of a totality encompassing the same and the other."[92] The process by which we conflate the Other with 'the same,' thus reducing alterity to ego, is totalization. In totalization, the Other "becomes a concept."[93]

Throughout his works, Levinas studies and critiques the philosophical models that encircle the Other into 'the same.' There are two prominent pieces on the topic, which I will analyze in the following section. The first will be the part titled "Metaphysics Precedes Ontology"[94] from

[90] Todd, "Experiencing Change, Encountering the Unknown: An Education in 'Negative Capability,'" 249.
[91] Ibid, 250.
[92] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 38.
[93] Ibid*,* 44.
[94] Ibid*,* 42-48.

his opus *Totality and Infinity;* the second will be his 1964 essay titled *Meaning and Sense.* A close examination of both these texts highlights Levinas' critique of Greek and contemporary philosophy—calling both of them into question by identifying them as ontology. Ontology in this sense needs to be understood as "a reduction of the other to the same by the interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being."[95] Through the adoption of these lenses, the problem of the Other thus finds an erroneous answer: "For the philosophical tradition, the *conflicts* between 'the same' and the Other are resolved by theory whereby the Other is reduced to the same."[96] Levinas' analysis warns of the dangers of locating human interaction in epistemic relations before ethical interpersonal relations.

When philosophy yields interpretations of language, cognition, theory and knowledge, as primordially epistemic, it sets up schemas that inevitably reduce the Other to 'the same.' In other words, by concentrating on meaning-making through a lens that allows the objectification of the Other, we neutralize alterity. Socrates, for example, exalted immanence as the middle ground or neutral ground. His ideas led followers to believe that everything one needed to know was already, somehow, hidden away within them. It is only through one's memory that we can activate knowledge. In Levinas' words, Socrates' teachings amount to the following: "to receive nothing from the Other but what is in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside—to receive nothing…"[97] This would imply that the signification of the Other lies not in the Other (in the face, as Levinas suggests) but within the cognition of the ego: it is already always part of the identity of the I. "The ideal of Socratic truth thus rests on the essential self-sufficiency of the same…"[98] Hence, meaning-making is the retrieval of

[95] Ibid, 43.
[96] Ibid, 47.
[97] Ibid, 43.
[98] Ibid, 44.

significations already found within the I, and signification of the Other is already found within the I. If they make up the I, they are part of the I, then the Other is absorbed within the system of identification of the I. The Other is part of the I, therefore the Other is 'the same.'

In stark contrast, meaning-making in platonic philosophy plays out in a diametrically different direction. For Plato, knowledge is collected in the *logos*, with the *logos* being meaning in itself—outside of every ego, outside of consciousness. It is, as Levinas describes it, an "intelligible word" that "precedes language and culture."[99] Platonic intellectualisms comes from this locus of permanent signification as "meaning is reducible to contents given to consciousness."[100] And it is given to consciousness through the mediation of an outside source. This schema also leads to a totalized relationship, where intellects are all tapping into the same 'the same.' Communication would thus be mediated by the significations collected within the *logos.*

Contemporary philosophy is, according to Levinas, characteristically anti-platonic, whereby meaning is a product of human cultural creation. Levinas states that in contemporary philosophy "the intelligible is inconceivable outside the becoming that suggests it."[101] All signification is creation, the work of poets and artists; there is no meaning outside of this human endeavor. It is a historical project, whereby meanings have come into existence and changed, even disappeared from use and been reintroduced. Contrasting Platonism, the opus of meaning is accessible to all because these cultures are not only allowed to access meaning but the official meaning makers themselves. This argument stresses that "multiple cultures are on the same plane."[102] However,

[99] Levinas, "Meaning and Sense," 42.
[100] Ibid, 35.
[101] Ibid, 42.
[102] Ibid.

when culture is the criterion for moderation between individuals and collectives, the diversity of meaning complicates matters by creating subordination and hierarchy.

1.4.1 Ontology and Totalization as Imperialism

Levinas is especially critical of Heidegger's ontology in *Being and Time*. He argues ontology neutralizes the existent through a relationship based on knowing and subordinates ethics to the comprehension of Being, thereby, holding the direction of Western philosophy toward the primacy of 'the same.'[103] By prioritizing *Being* over *existence*, Heidegger ranks epistemic relations over ethical ones and impersonal signification over alterity. "Knowledge of being in general—fundamental ontology—presupposes the *factual situation* of the mind that knows."[104] Ontology, as a first philosophy, necessitates comprehension of the other, not as Other, but as a theme or concept, as a theory. Intersubjective relations succumb to totalization through means of subordination to the egoism of 'the same.'

The "I think" suppresses the Other through its new trope of power: "I can."[105] The appearance of knowledge directly squashes the possibility of interpersonal, ethical relations. In ontology, knowledge and power quickly become a force that possesses. It is imperialism: possession through which the Other *becomes mine*. In line with some of his contemporaries, Levinas "traced the root of totalitarianism to false identity thinking."[106] "To assume to be the same as the other, for Levinas, is to colonize the other in an imperious move."[107]

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[103] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 46.
[104] Emmanuel Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?," in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernrasconi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana, 1996), 2.
[105] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 46.
[106] Guoping Zhao, "Levinas and the Philosophy of Education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 48, no. 4 (May 12, 2015): 323–30, 223, https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1041007.
[107] Tod, "Experiencing Change, Encountering the Unknown: An Education in 'Negative Capability,'" 248.

Levinas goes so far as to call ontology "a philosophy of power"[108]—a philosophy that puts freedom over justice. Yet, so do all the other philosophical models that posit 'the same' over the Other. To revere impersonal universality is inhumanity.[109] The systems of domination that shaped our history, imperialism and colonial tyranny, were born from such inhumanity. Without ethics before ontology, without justice before freedom, without presence before knowledge, there is only tyranny. 'To know' the Other equals justifying my actions through the existence of knowledge provided to us by the mediation described in the philosophical traditions of Western philosophy. "The unknowability of the Other is not merely a trope for suggesting that the Other is an object that appears to me beyond my current frames of cognition, and with other, better lenses I can come to 'know' her better."[110] Accepting alterity and its ethical primacy over all other systems is the way to interpersonal relations that will not be plagued by tyranny.

1.4.2 On Ethics and the Face—The Interlocutor

Levinas' groundbreaking teaching on alterity moves the focus away from idealist theories and the contemporary theory of ontology, especially as proposed by Heidegger. He promotes a novel position, one that is first and foremost preoccupied with ethics. He ponders and finds ways to answer the questions: "How can the same, produced as egoism, enter into a relationship with an other without immediately divesting it of its alterity?;"[111] "How can a being enter a relation with the other without allowing its very self to be crushed by the other?;"[112] and "How, in your alterity, can I remain I, without being absorbed or losing myself in you?"[113] At the same time,

[108] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 46.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Sharon Todd, "Education Incarnate," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 48, no. 4 (May 20, 2015): 405–17, 412, https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1041444.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Levinas, *Time and the Other,* 77.
[113] Ibid.

Levinas encourages interpersonal relationships that do not totalize the Other through a submissive play of knowledge and power, but rather a face-to-face event between existents whose alterity is recognized before any conceivable system of human meaning-making. In the section that follows, I will offer a reading of Levinas' ethics as a first philosophy, pondering metaphysics and his notion of the face-to-face. Additionally, I will reflect on the idea of the interlocutor from 'the height.'

1.4.2.1 Ethics as a first philosophy

In a conversation with Philippe Nemo, Levinas is asked about establishing rules for ethics. He responds, "My task does not consist in constructing ethics; I only try to find its meaning."[114] In Levinas's writings, ethics is as basic as any attempt at first philosophy.[115] Adrian Peperzak adds Levinas' Ethics as a first philosophy to the list of other philosophers who have intended to create works that serve as the basis for their extensive canons (specifically, Plato's Republic, Spinoza's Ethics, and Kant's Critiques).[116] Todd writes, "Levinas revokes the claims (transcendental and otherwise) that ethics is subsequent and therefore subordinate to a thorough understanding of the nature of existence."[117] Rather than elaborate a treatise on morality, describing and prescribing ethical behavior, Levinas strives to establish that the relationships between people[118] must become the basic structures upon which all philosophy builds its canon. This relationship is more than a relationship between two beings; it is the relationship between two beings that are other. The welcoming of the Other is the ultimate fact, for "moral

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[114] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity. Conversations with Philippe Nemo. Translated by Richard A. Cohen.* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2011), 90.
[115] Adriaan T. Peperzak, "Preface," in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Pittsburg: Indiana, 1996), xii.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Todd, "Levinas and Education: The Question of Implication," 2.
[118] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 79.

consciousness is primary and the source of first philosophy."[119] Ethics offers an "irreducible structure upon which all structures rest."[120]

The ethical relationship is distinct from any kind of relationship that would objectify its participants as they congregate. When an event takes place among people, there is an ethical reality being enacted before egocentric totalization: when face-to-face, the Other does not submit or conquer. In an ethical experience, the Other calls me into question and summons responsibility. For Levinas, ethics is a calling: the ego is called into responsibility by the presence of the Other.[121]

Ethics is also credited as being "the critical essence of knowledge."[122] Contrary to an ontology that promotes the objectification of the other by signifying or thematizing him into 'the same' egoistic consciousness, the face-to-face event awakens critical knowledge of the self by having the Other call the ego into question. This critical stance leads the I away from both ontology and theory that subjugate the Other through knowledge and enables participants of the ethical event to contemplate each Other's absolute otherness whilst enabling a process critical of the self (and not of the Other). Critique of the I, this calling into responsibility, precedes thematization. Ethics precedes and has priority over ontology, marking morality not as a "branch of philosophy," but rather as "first philosophy"[123] It is the first event from which to start. This relation does not permit a representation of alterity but a discourse with the Other—not as a signification but as an interlocutor. The absolute Other is accepted as infinite and as overflowing every idea that can be had of him, therefore as metaphysical.

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[119] Ibid, 77.
[120] Ibid, 79.
[121] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 43.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ann Chinnery, "Aesthetics of Surrender: Levinas and the Disruption of Agency in Moral Education," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 22, no. 1 (2003): 5–17, 5. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021129309618.

1.4.2.2 Metaphysics is an Ethics

In *Totality and Infinity,* metaphysics is identified with ethics and first philosophy.[124] To consider oneself a metaphysician is to understand that "the metaphysical is an ethical behavior."[125] In metaphysical relationships, the I is open to others in their multiple existences[126]—to the pluralism that follows from diversity. Metaphysics recognizes the stranger as a source from which the I receives beyond its own capacity. Todd said it thus: "It is the mystery and unknowability of the Other that 'reveal' themselves."[127] The Other is not in the ego. There is no immanence or unity amongst beings. The Other, who is outside of the I, who is not 'the same,' transcends any capacity and intent to encapsulate him because he is infinite in the sense that he overflows whatever idea I could ever think of him.

In "Transcendence and Intelligibility," Levinas asks a question akin to my own quandary: "what is this thinking we are seeking, which is neither assimilation of the Other to 'the same' nor integration of the Other into 'the same,' a thinking which does not bring all transcendence back to immanence and does not compromise transcendence in understanding it?"[128] To this question he exclaims: "impossible demand!"[129] It is impossible, that is, if we do not consider the metaphysical dimension of ethics. In this same piece, Levinas rehearses Kant's approach to metaphysics as the "Notion of Transcendence" and Heidegger's proclamation of the "End of Metaphysics;" as well as the Bergsonian distinction between "time of everyday life and time of

[124] See Adriaan T. Peperzak, Preface, Emmanuel Levinas Basic Philosophical Writings, p. xi; and Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 79.
[125] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 78.
[126] Ibid*,* 220.
[127] Todd, "Education Incarnate," 411.
[128] Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Intelligibility," in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana, 1996), 155.
[129] Ibid,155.

interior life."[130] Finally, he moves on to Descartes' idea of the "Infinite in Us"[131] to explain the intelligibility of transcendence. Metaphysics is concerned with what is beyond: what is beyond the I, what is beyond containment, what is beyond the "capacity of the *cogito*."[132] The idea of the infinite, the transcendent, or the metaphysical is Levinas' answer to the inquiry into the possibility of interpersonal relations beyond totalization, because thinking beyond what the ego thinks implies an ethical relation among men.

1.4.2.3 The face-to-face

The ethical relationship is distinct from any kind of relationship that would objectify its participants as they come together. Intersubjective relations are an ethical reality enacted before egocentric totalization: when face-to-face, the Other does not submit or conquer. Levinas advances his case in *Time and the Other* by drawing comparisons and contrasts with Heidegger and Hegel. He separates himself from Heidegger, critiquing the idea that human association is one of "side by side, around something, around a common term, and more precisely, (…) around the truth."[133] Regarding Hegel, he rejects the idea that components can merge into synthesis, for this would be a totalization of one component into the Other. So, what is the face-to-face relationship? What is this relation that permits an ethical approach to intersubjectivity and not the totalization of the Other?

Being face to face, or being in a face-to-face situation, is an event. It occurs among people in proximity to each other. It is the experience had by people who are in proximity to one another. Ethical interpersonal relations cannot be enacted between living individuals and artifacts

[130] Ibid, 153-4.
[131] Ibid, 156.
[132] Ibid, 156.
[133] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 42.

left behind by others, such as writing or art, for those artifacts will be interpreted—they are "belonging to the past"[134]—and hence totalized into 'the same' who comes upon them. In the same sense, we cannot know the Other from his work, as if we intend to come to the Other through this window, "the other is surprised in his intimacy, but where, like the person of history, he is, to be sure, exposed, but does not express himself."[135] The face-to-face is fleeting, from one moment to the next. But in itself, this instant stands alone—"cut off from past and future."[136] "The face is a living presence."[137]

The ethical intersubjectively event is prior to any ontological comprehension of Being and thus escapes the knowledge-power trap: "This relationship is neither a knowledge relationship nor a willful act of the ego."[138] It pushes back on universalization because it welcomes and is impacted directly by the Other's singular alterity, contrasting ontology that "can only think of the individual as a particular instance of something more general."[139] Ontology is preoccupied with making sense of the Other in relation to Being, whilst the face-to-face is receptive to the infinity in the Other before meaning-making. Ontology can never be the basis of relationality; it is not fundamental in the sense that it is not the original event between people—the presence of the Other is that fundamental event.

The face-to-face resists totalization because it takes place before the conscious intent to signify. The Other is irreducible to me, to 'the same,' because he exceeds any image I have of him. The face-to-face is thus "the confrontation that resists the imposition of my own categories,

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[134] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 130.
[135] Ibid, 67.
[136] Lingis, "Fateful Images," 64.
[137] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 67.
[138] Gert Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (New York: Routledge, Taylor And Francis Group, 2016), 19.
[139] Gert Biesta, "Learning from Levinas: A Response," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 22 (January 2003): 61–68, 63, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1021137611436.

and thus my own conceptual control."[140] To totalize means to absorb the Other into a system, into unity; however, the face-to-face is Levinas' effort to identify the irreducibility of radical otherness in an event prior to the epistemic power-knowledge move by part of the ego. To breach totality, one's thoughts must be "*faced* with an other refractory to categories."[141]

The face-to-face is the event where "an existent presents itself personally."[142] There is no representation of him—it is him present in the flesh. Signification and meaning derived from Platonic philosophy or contemporary ontology are thus not needed as intermediaries for the relation is first hand. Signification "consists of a relation with the one to whom I express an expression, the one to whom expression expresses. Signification thus derives its sense from this particular event."[143] In Levinas' words: "Meaning is not produced as an ideal essence; it is said and taught by presence."[144] Signification "is preeminently the presence of exteriority."[145] The face-to-face is a "collectivity and not a communion."[146] There is no intermediary.[147] "The face is signification and signification without context."[148] "The face is meaning all by itself."[149]

In an ethical experience, the Other unveils himself as another, and as he does so, he calls me into question and summons responsibility toward him. The face-to-face is the ethical relationship par excellence, "a relationship of infinite and unconditional responsibility for the Other."[150] Akin to the concept of gift-giving in Derrida, this responsibility to the Other has the

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[140] Zhao, "Levinas and the Philosophy of Education," 323-330, 323.
[141] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 40.
[142] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 142.
[143] Biesta, "The Rediscovery of Teaching," 380.
[144] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 66.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Levinas, *Time and the Other,* 74.
[147] Ibid, 94.
[148] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 86.
[149] Ibid, 86.
[150] Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, 19.

peculiarity of being one-directional: I am responsible for the Other without expecting reciprocity.[151] Just as ethics precedes ontology, responsibility as a response to the calling of the Other precedes consciousness and comprehension. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas described it as: "a saying prior to anything said."[152] As Gert Biesta points out, a response is not necessarily something that is said—responsibility is something that is done.[153]

Responsibility is the hallmark of the relationship formed with the Other when we are face-to-face. In responsibility, only I can say something to that person who is with me—only I can respond. No one can take my place—I am not 'the same,' I am different, and I have entered into a relationship with him in which I, and I alone, must respond to his calling. No one can take my place. Hence, as Todd wrote, "relationships are only possible between two—two subjects who are separate, irreducible in their existence."[154] The fact that only I can respond is based on the existential difference between existents: we do not share existence. We are not reducible to 'the same.' Each one of us is unique in our existence: separate (alone even), embodied persons, with unique exteriority. "For Levinas, the relation between persons is not about two people who share the same being or the same time of being, but who, in their relationality, are expressions of radically different existences."[155] Responsibility becomes expressed when we unconditionally assume the Other's alterity and speak to it, responding to it with actions.

As Levinas commented, "The true union or true togetherness is not a togetherness of synthesis, but a togetherness of face to face."[156] When we come together, we do so through

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[151] Levinas, *Time and the Other,* 137.
[152] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence. Translated by Alphonso Lingis.* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 43.
[153] Gert Biesta, "The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common: Education and the Language of Responsibility," *Interchange* 35, no. 3 (September 2004): 307–24, 317, https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02698880.
[154] Tod, "Experiencing Change, Encountering the Unknown: An Education in 'Negative Capability,'" 248.
[155] Todd, "Levinas and Education: The Question of Implication," 2.
[156] Levinas, *Ethics and infinity,* 77.

multiplicity: not totalization. We come together as a plurality of existence, as separate existents who do not ever become a unified system. Multiplicity is possible only because of our separate existence—of our inner lives and our individual exteriority. Were we to participate in the same, external point of view, multiplicity would give way to the participation of all in the same.[157] A genuine multiplicity is invisible from the outside, otherwise, it would become common, 'the same,' and collapse into totality.[158]

Pluralism appears as an infinite number of face-to-face, interpersonal relations amongst each other. The alterity of a person is revealed in the face, as an event. These events and the differences expressed may not be universalized as generalized knowledge; otherwise, pluralism succumbs to a mediated system of knowledge and is thus totalized. In plurality there is an individuated response to individual alterity: I maintain a society with the individual other—never with a generalized other. [159] This refusal to impose, to overcome the Other, and the respect that follows, the unconditional receiving of the irreducible alterity of the Other, instantiates an ethical relation and forms the foundation of genuine multiplicity.[160]

1.4.2.4 The height

There are different ways to experience an intersubjective encounter between two people who are other to each other. When approached from a position of dominance and ego, the encounter becomes a totalizing act. However, if approached from the dimension of 'the height,' where the interlocutor is positioned as a teacher, the encounter will be a genuine ethical act. Instead of wanting to engulf the Other into sameness by interpreting them with prior theoretical

[157] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 120.
[158] Zhao, "Singularity and Community: Levinas and Democracy," 349.
[159] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 121.
[160] Zhao, "Singularity and Community: Levinas and Democracy," 350.

frames, the dimension of 'the height' offers the possibility of learning from the Other—of accepting the Others' teachings.

Those in 'the height' who teach face-to-face "bring me more than I contain."[161] In this sense, the face-to-face, where the dimension of height is put into play, is an opening where we are ready to receive from the Other. The infinite in the Other is what he brings to me that is not part of myself. If I am open to receiving it, then the relationship is not one of totalization: it becomes a dialogue. However, because the intention is not to totalize the Other, but rather to accept what the Other brings with them and offers me, the interaction is a teaching experience

The height alludes to the fact that I am yielding to the Other's differences and accepting to be taught. As a result, the relationship between the I and the Other's alterity is one of height. This is far from a dominant act. It is, in fact, an act of nonviolent transitivity.[162] The disclosure that takes place happens with consent and respect. The Other is elevated above the I by the self, rather than imposed on it. I, the self, desire the Other. It is a desire to be filled with more than one can ever contain.

When elevating the Other to the height, there is also the important issue of weight. The weight of the response I must give the Other must now fall on my shoulders. As Levinas writes, "the Other (Autrui) is not only outside but is already at a height."[163] The Other, by being in the height, calls the I into question—it creates a relationship in which the self must question itself. It is not judgemental of the Other, but rather of the self. It is auto-critical.[164] Importantly, this

[161] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 51.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Height," in *Basci Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana, 1996), 20.
[164] Ibid.

circumstance requires the self to respond and be responsible for the ways it responds to the disclosure of the Other.

1.5 Orientating Non-Totalizing Pedagogies to Ethics or Metaphysics

Throughout this chapter, I intended to understand how, according to Levinas, the supremacy of knowledge over that of face-to-face interactions leads to the totalization of the Other into 'the same.' Approaching the Other through knowledge is only one mode of interaction possible—though it has unfortunately been the prevailing model in modernity. This is a claim I will substantiate in Chapter II. With this reading of Levinas, I hope to have communicated that his First Philosophy is an ethics. It does not address questions of validity, hierarchy, or truth among different epistemologies; rather, it posits the initial encounter with the Other before any epistemic considerations at all. Levinas establishes intersubjective parameters for responding to the Other in proximity. Hence, different and ethical ways of facing the Other are indeed possible. This ethical basis now underlies and supports the philosophical claims and pedagogical practices I analyze in the pages to come.

My orientation toward Levinas was inspired and required by the topic of modernity/coloniality as approached by contemporary Latin American philosophers, especially by Enrique Dussel, whose work will greatly impact the rest of this dissertation. I will be analyzing and utilizing Enrique Dussel's opus on liberation and ethics, and since he relies heavily on Levinas and speaks in his terms, any attempt to understand Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation without prior knowledge of Levinas might prove futile. Furthermore, familiarity with Dussel is required for understanding subsequent Latin American thought, including Decoloniality.

At the same time, Levinas' novel conceptions of 'totality,' and 'totalization,' offered Dussel a metaphysical framework in which imperial and dominating European modernity, and colonial and dependent Latin American Christendom founded the historical and ontological logic of oppression.[165] By adopting Levinas' Metaphysics as a means to approach contemporary Latin America and its history, Dussel was able to counter totality with the praxis of liberation founded on alterity (infinity). In his work as a philosopher and historiographer, Dussel uses Levinas' work to interpret the totalizing power dynamics experienced throughout Latin America's history and goes even further by proposing the enactment of an Ethics of Liberation heavily informed by Levinas' ethics that puts alterity/infinity centerstage.

[165] Dussel and Guillot, *Liberación Latinoamericana y Emmanuel Levinas*, 13.

Chapter II: Modernity/coloniality

Working with Levinas has demanded patience, knowledge of his philosophical canon, and a high tolerance for moving among abstract ideas. Yes, his work is highly conceptual and metaphorical. However, there is no doubt that his ethical postulates are direct responses to the terrifying reality of WWII and the post-war era. His ethics as a first philosophy are a critical stance on a tangible, material, and historical reality. What he gifts to us is a framework. It is a framework that puts the existent face-to-face with others in an event: a moment of mutual presence and absence. His ethics are thus the framework I will be using to understand another historical happening: modernity/coloniality. Like all human realities, modernity/coloniality is a consequence of observable interpersonal behavior. I hope to make it clear that this chapter is not about the ideas we philosophers ponder from our armchairs. On the contrary, it is about shared lived experience and the ethical principles that center this experience on mutual respect for existents, thus moving away from dynamics that submit one existent to the other.

When the Other erupts into the world, there are many ways to face him/her. The 'problem of the Other' is the problem of a subject existing among other subjects and treating them thus: accepting their identity and respecting their interiority and separateness. In order to accomplish this ethical stance, the central hurdle to be overcome is the propensity to submit the Other to a process by which he will become 'the same.' This coping mechanism stems from our incapacity to comprehend and accept what is different.

In this chapter, I will develop one of the premises of my hypothesis. This premise states that: modernity/coloniality is an example of approaching the problem of alterity by totalizing the Other into 'the same.' Each historical period has a predominant ethos and relationships amongst people are prescribed by it. Ethicity, the ethical quality of something, depends on the way the

'problem of the Other' is approached. During modernity/coloniality, a common approach to the 'problem of the Other' was through the totalization. This means that the Other is absorbed in some way into 'the same.' To build the grounds for this argument, I will engage with the thinking of the modernity/coloniality working group[166] through readings of their texts. I will work closely with the canon of Enrique Dussel—an opus developed on the promise of continuing Levinas' ethics. It is worth noting that this second chapter follows the first, not merely because of the chronology of philosophical thought, but because Enrique Dussel's work is highly indebted to the philosophical inheritance of Levinas' ethics. So much so, that as Dussel notes, there is a way to "continue Levinas' philosophical discourse from Latin America,"[167] which is what he sets off to do with his own ethics: The Ethics of Liberation.

In order to delineate modernity's totalizing force, I will present the working group's notion of modernity/coloniality as it highlights two different approaches to the historical age and the reality of human intersubjective experiences that took place during that time. Afterward, I will sketch out the four examples of inadequate treatment of the Other in order to argue for the central premise of this chapter and explain the importance of the *ego conquiro* as the philosophical antecedent to Descartes' *ego cogito*.

'Ethicity' is a central concept of this chapter and, therefore, one that requires more clarification. In Spanish, *eticidad* is defined by the Real Academia Española as "(c)ualidad de

[166] The modernity/coloniality working group is a collective made up of intellectuals who currently work in the US and Latin America and whose central concern is, as described by Arturo Escobar, the elaboration "of a new interpretation of modernity, globality, and difference (in Arturo Escobar, "Mundos y Conocimientos De Otro Modo," 51.) The modernity/coloniality working group strives to understand and interpret the happenings of the last 500 years on Latin American soil. They are influenced by Critical Theory. The cohesiveness of the collective is centered on their common topic of study and interpretation of coloniality as the underbelly of Modernity. It is multidisciplinary and has among its thinkers sociologists, semiologists, pedagogues, anthropologists, literary critics, and philosophers.

[167] Dussel and Guillot, *Liberación Latinoamericana y Emmanuel Levinas*, 7.

ético"[168] [quality of being ethical]. *Eticidad* is a word and concept utilized by Enrique Dussel in his canon on ethics and/of liberation. In his book, *Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana*, the philosopher distinguishes between *eticidad* and *moralidad* [ethicity and morality]. He writes that *eticidad* comes from the Greek tradition and *moralidad* comes from Latin.[169] He stresses that *eticidad* holds a much richer meaning, whilst *moralidad* is restrictive.[170] According to him, *eticidad* gives us a way to judge our relational practices by "depending on Alterity and not Totality."[171] It moves judgment of actions away from the realm of ontology and Being into the realm of the existents' separateness in their existence.[172] *Eticidad* is "a certain respect for something other."[173] However, this respect must stem from the acknowledgment of the infinity that is the Other in his separateness from 'the same.' For the purpose of aligning my concepts and vocabulary to those used in the study of ethics of liberation, I have translated *eticidad* into 'ethicity': the base word is ethics, and the suffix is "-ity" (which denotes the quality, state, or degree). In general, I mean ethicity as the ethical quality of a situation, reality, or behavior. In technical terms, however, I employ ethicity as the quality of approaching the Other from an ethical stance—which references approaching the Other in their alterity and not through totalization.

[168] RAE ASALE, "'Diccionario de La Lengua Española' - Edición Del Tricentenario," "Diccionario de la lengua española" - Edición del Tricentenario (Servicio de consulta electrónica al "Diccionario de la lengua española," 2018), https://dle.rae.es/.
[169] Enrique Dussel, *Para Una Ética de La Liberación Latinoamericana*, vol. II (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Argentina Editores, 1973), 13.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid, 20.

2.1 Modernity/coloniality: Two Sides of the Same Coin

While conceptions of European modernity have a long-standing philosophical tradition, moloniality was conceived and introduced as an idea by Anibal Quijano in the late decades of last century.[174] It was later adopted by Walter Mignolo and eventually became a core component of the work done by the modernity/coloniality group.[175] In a piece titled "*Colonialidad y modernidad-racionalidad,*"[176] Quijano describes coloniality as a "relation of direct, political, social, and cultural dominations by the Europeans over those conquered on all other continents."[177] He continues to point out that even though the Americas, Africa, and Asia, have claimed independence from Europe at varying times during the past three centuries, it is thanks to the "intersubjective constructions"[178] of concepts like race, for example, that there is ongoing discrimination of cultures from the periphery. This stronghold over "colonized populations categorized as 'those races,' 'those ethnicities,' or 'those 'nations'" is what he denotes "coloniality of power."[179] In other words, coloniality perpetuates itself through the social construction of a hierarchy of cultures that identifies that of the West as its highest ideal, and hence, allocates power to those higher up in this hierarchy and dominates those lower down by the insistence of such an imagined structure of importance. Coloniality is not the straightforward act of placing others under political rule, Quijano contends, it is the colonization of the dominated imaginary.[180]

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[174] Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, Car. Du N.: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Anibal Quijano, Pablo Quintero, and Zulma Palermo, *Aníbal Quijano : Textos de Fundación* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Del Signo, 2014), 60.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid, 61.
[180] Ibid, 61.

According to Mignolo, coloniality first appeared in the XVI century with "the emergence of a structure of control and management of authority, economy, subjectivity, gender, and sexual norms and relations that were driven by Western (Atlantic) Europeans (Iberian Peninsula, Holland, France, and England) both in their internal conflicts and in their exploitation of labor and expropriation of land."[181] Coloniality and colonialism differ in content and expression: coloniality refers to the regime's epistemic, linguistic-symbolic, and discursive dimensions, whereas Colonialism refers to the economic-political-military dimensions.[182]

Modernity, the image on the 'right' side of the coin, is the consolidation of a hegemonic power so mighty that it suffocates all other ways of knowing and existing into a construct that was only local and now glorified as universal—modernity is the myth by which Europeans established themselves as the center and all those around them as mere peripheries.[183] But the development of this colossal empire, establishing itself as the most important and culminating epoch of world history, is complicated, to say the least. The modernity/coloniality working group contends that modernity "unfold(ed) in the sixteenth century with capitalism and the emergence of the Atlantic commercial circuit."[184] Quijano goes so far as to establish that the creation of America was modernity's constitutive act.[185] Contrary to the other traditions that situate the start of the modern era at later dates, the members of the project postulate that the year when it all began was 1492 when Spain was "the only European power with the capacity for external

[181] Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity,* 7.
[182] See Jorge Polo Blanco and Milany Gómez Betancur, "Modernidad Y Colonialidad En América Latina. ¿Un Binomio Indisociable? Reflexiones En Torno a Las Propuestas de Walter Mignolo," *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 69 (April 24, 2019): 2–13, https://doi.org/10.7440/res69.2019.01.
[183] Enrique Dussel and Michael D Barber, *The Invention of the Americas : Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 18.
[184] Walter Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 57–96, 58, https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-101-1-57.
[185] Quijano, Palermo, and Quintero, *Textos De fundación*, 71.

territorial conquest."[186] Dussel identifies a 'first modernity' during the Conquest of America and the Atlantic, a first modernity that would eventually segue into the second more well-known modernity originating from the Northern European States.

Modernity/coloniality is a construct that helps us bring together two different experiences that happened simultaneously in a complex global interaction, influencing each other and yet each individuated. While still acknowledging the twofold essence that made up this historical epoch, this reconceptualization of the events that took place between the XIV century and the last century is brilliantly woven together without one discounting the other. Rather it can be read as a dance between two components that witness each other but do not totalize the historical account into one and the same. Modernity and coloniality are correlative notions.[187] Though they run parallel, these categories explain a two-fold interlaced reality.

Walter Mignolo saw modernity and coloniality as more than a double-edged concept, which he uses as an abbreviation of a complex contextual reality. For him, it denotes a "period of planetary expansion" that he calls "modern colonialism and colonial modernities." It is a good thing he sums it up because it is a mouthful. It is also a conceptualization that requires intense thought. And though, as explained, each component of modernity/coloniality is dependent on the other, they are not axiologically equal: coloniality is, "the reverse and unavoidable side of 'modernity'—its darker side, like the part of the moon we do not see when we observe it from the earth."[188]

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[186] Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)," in *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*, ed. John Beverly, José Aronna, and José Oviedo (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), 67, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822382683.
[187] See Polo Blanco and Gómez Betancur, "Modernidad Y Colonialidad En América Latina," 2019.
[188] Ibid.

2.2 America as the Other to Europe as 'the same'

Dussel utilizes conceptual categories inherited from Levinas in order to paint a picture of the totalizing expressions of human interaction promoted at the onset of modernity/coloniality, some of which are still prevalent today. Latin America is thus conceptualized as "the initial 'other side' of Modernity—dominated and encumbered."[189] Latin America is "the first periphery of modern Europe."[190] Dussel introduces four historical categories for analyzing relations between the American Other and the European in his book *1492, El encubrimiento del otro*. I hypothesize these instances are examples of unethicity, as ethical intersubjective treatment is rejected, and the approach towards the Other is thematic and totalizing.

Every category of treatment of the Americas is a different 'existential experience.'[191] Because they are different, they need to be identified as separate and individually studied. These four treatments are: invention, discovery, conquest, and colonization.[192] Each follows the other chronologically. Each detail a historical experience between Europe and the Americas. This treatment will conclude with the colonization of the Americas and will simultaneously create the conditions needed for modernity to start and continue steadfastly as the predominant notion that will eventually overtake all prior and different historical experiences.

A historical character represented each treatment. Christopher Columbus represented the invention, Amerigo Vespucci the discovery, and Hernan Cortes the conquest. Dussel's historical figure for colonization was not European nor male: it was la Malinche,[193] the Indigenous

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[189] Escobar, "Mundos y Conocimientos De Otro Modo," 60-61.
[190] Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)," 67.
[191] Dussel, *1492: El Encubrimiento Del Otro*, 23.
[192] Ibid.
[193] In 1950 in his essay *El Laberinto de la Soledad* [*The Labyrinth of Solitude*], Octavio Paz analyzed the concept of *mexicanidad* trying to explain how the Mexican people attempted to affirm themselves in front of, against of and in spite of 'the others.' Mexicans are the 'Hijos de la Chingada,' the sons of an undetermined mother, a vague mother, a mother who is not their mother. In the chapter "*Los Hijos de La Malinche*" ["The Sons of La Malinche"] Paz

daughter of a holy man, who was given to Cortes as one of many women offered in Tlaxcala as a plea for peace. She does not represent the dominant treatment of the Other—but the quintessential Latin American Other: raped, objectified, and humiliated. *La Malinche* represents the domination over women's bodies, but also over men's. Indigenous men were put to work in the service of gold-hungry exploiters, forced to use their bodies in labor that would never benefit the workers nor their families.

The first historical treatment of the Americas was not as 'the new world,' but rather, as the place towards which Columbus destined his voyage: India. Dussel calls this treatment the invention (of America's) "Asian-Being."[194] However, following the keen informative eye of Regina Cortina,[195] it is more appropriate to call it the invention of America's "Indian-Being." At first, both the continent and those inhabiting it were thought to be Indian. Columbus set out to find a new maritime route that would lead Europeans to India, an important task considering that all other paths to the Orient were blocked. Thus, when Columbus reached America for the first and subsequent times, he could not see the continent as it was, but as he wished to see it, and he could not see it as anything other than India. Columbus dies unaware that he had stumbled upon America, believing that he had reached India until his death. This is why Dussel suggests the first treatment we receive is one of mistaken identity: the invention of our 'Indian-Being,' a historical category created by superimposing another identity onto those they found inhabiting these lands. But that area of the world, which Columbus claims to have reached, does not exist, except for

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portraits *la Malinche* as the representation of '*la chingada*,' the raped mother, a symbol of the Spanish conquest of the Mexican people. She represents not just the conquest but also a violation in the historical sense and in the very flesh of the Indian women. *La Malinche* is a woman that was not only raped, but used and disposed of when not useful, she embodies the Indian women who were obnubilated, seduced and raped by the Spaniards. After centuries, this raped mother continues to be violated, subdued, conquered, used and disposed but now not by the Spaniards but her their own sons. See Octavio Paz, "Los Hijos De La Chingada," in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1990).

[194] Ibid, 31.

[195] Cortina, Regina. "Personal Communication." NY: New York, April 8, 2022.

that tiny window in the imaginary of the Europeans' before they realized that, in reality, Columbus had never reached India, but another—equally alien—continent.

The 'discovery' of the 'new world'[196] (the second historical moment of contact between America and Europe) commenced when, to the Europeans' surprise, this land was finally recognized as a distinct continent—a fourth landmass. The known world was comprised of three parts: Europe, Asia, and Africa. Understandably, integrating a new continent into their worldview presented a difficult shock, and forever changed Europe's own conception of itself. Dussel contends that it is during this period of 'discovery,' that Europe transitions, abruptly, into modernity as it finds itself at the geographic center of the world, with Africa to its south, Asia to its east, and America to its west. Importantly, America and Asia were only thought to be accessible to each other through Europe. It is at this point that Europe becomes the center—both on the known map and in its own imaginary. Europe establishes itself as the ego, the I, always juxtaposed to the Other (the African, Asian, and American Other).

The 'discovery' of the 'new world' gave way to the 'conquest.' 'Conquest' is understood as the "praxis of domination,"[197] an imposition over the Other. In this case, the imposition of Spain over the myriad of Indigenous civilizations that inhabited the Americas. This was a conquest made possible because of the construction of a juridical and military condition related to the catholic church and its duty over the infidels. Conquest, with violence at its core, was the hallmark of the relationship established between the civilizations of those coming from Europe, and the Indian civilizations of the Aztecs. Ever since there was knowledge of Indigenous peoples who inhabited these new lands, with organized-and-institutionalized ways of living, there arose an objective among those Europeans who looked for opportunities to become rich: that of

[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid, 39.

conquest. Through the violent domination of physical bodies, comes the dominion over entire peoples (as cultures) and the exploitation of the resources of the new lands. Dussel stresses that not all Europeans who came were the same, nor did all of them agree with the treatment given to the Indigenous peoples. As Dussel explains in-depth, Bartolomé de las Casas, the first philosopher of the modern age, wrote critically and vehemently against the subjugation of the Indigenous American Other for the profit of the greedy and tyrannical Europeans. "La "Conquista" es afirmación práctica del "Yo conquisto" y "negación del Otro" como otro."[198] [Conquest is the practical affirmation of 'I conquer' and the 'negation of the Other' as other.]

The conquest is the end of many worlds, the worlds of those conquered,[199] and the beginning of a new world order: that of coloniality and colonization—the longest established relationship between America and Europe. If conquest was the violent subjugation of physical and individual bodies, colonization would be the ever-ongoing domination over the entirety of life, of social life, of their world through cultural, economic, and political means.

Dussel claims that America is the first modern European colony—before Asia and Africa were transformed as peripheries in relation to Europe.[200] A colony is an economic-political figure following the model of Roman 'colonies' that were the "dominated lands and peoples that spoke Latin and paid tribute."[201] Colonization is the domination of everyday life: which means it is a domination of everything that makes up a civilization. In the case of Latin America, Spain as the center of world domination will subjugate the Indigenous Other, after the initial violent military domination, through the practice of erotic, pedagogic, cultural, political, and economic

[198] Ibid, 47.
[199] Ibid, 45.
[200] Ibid, 49.
[201] Ibid.

domination.[202] Domination so vast, so all-encompassing, that the Indigenous Other no longer stands as Other, but is totalized, engulfed, absorbed into the center as 'the same.' People in America are no longer Other. Indigenous communities and worlds (so different from each other) become one and the same as they are now part of the Catholic Monarchy, of Charles V's empire, the empire that boasted that on its lands the sun never set.

Modernity would not have been what it was and is today, had it not been for the interactions and exchanges between continents in all respects that pertain to society: interactions and exchanges at the erotic level, at the pedagogic level, at the cultural level, at the political level, at the economic level, and most importantly, ethical interactions and exchanges. Unfortunately, the relations of power that structured the interactions between continents gave way to a divide: Europe 'in the center,' and America, Africa, and Asia as its colonies (in the periphery). Relations between the actors of modernity/coloniality were not based on dialogue, respect, and ethicity. Rather, the conquest and continuing domination of the colonies were and are the clearest manifestation of the I, of 'the same,' taking possession of the colonial Other and totalizing its existence. Modernity, if understood as the historical era of totalization of the periphery to the European center, is a clear example of approaching the problem of alterity by totalizing the Other into 'the same.' Modernity internalized the entire globalized world, whereas in previous instances it was done to a lesser extent, but with the same results: the rejection of alterity and the infinite character of otherness.

[202] Ibid.

2.3 *Ego conquiro:* the first iteration of the modern ego

According to philosophical Western tradition, Descartes' *ego cogito* has been historically identified as the prime representative development at the heart of the birth of modernity. However, in his Anti-Cartesian Meditations,[203] Dussel eruditely—and mercilessly—takes on the task of questioning this accepted truth and proposes an earlier conception of the ego that deserves to be identified as that which informs the construction of modernity and the modern man. His analysis clearly recognizes the anteriority of the *ego conquiro* before the *ego cogito*. The *ego cogito*, then, not only comes chronologically afterward but is informed by the *ego conquiro*.

The 'ego' is described by Dussel as "the absolute origin of a solipsist discourse."[204] However, the Cartesian discourse of the *ego cogito*, characterized by its methodological skepticism, appears after "another kind of skepticism, which is not less radical, that puts into question the 'humanity' of those colonized."[205] Patricio Lepe Carrión will point out that this "colonial skepticism"[206] will highlight the difference between the European self and the peripheral Other, between the "conquistador and the conquered, one more human than the other, and therefore, more real."[207] Hence, the appearance of the *ego conquiro* stems from the identification of the self via the ontological, moral, and civilizing totalization of the objectified Latin American Other who was conveniently (yet not without its critics) believed to lack

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[203] See Enrique Dussel, "Anti-Cartesian Meditations: On the Origin of the Philosophical Anti-Discourse of Modernity," *Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 13, no. 1 (2014): 11–52, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351118504_Anti-Cartesian_Meditations_on_the_origin_of_the_philosophical_anti-discourse_of_modernity.
[204] Dussel, *1492: El Encubrimiento Del Otro,"* 53.
[205] Patricio Lepe Carrión, "Apuntes Sobre La Objetivación Del 'Cuerpo' Como 'Naturaleza': Del Ego Conquiro al Ego Cogito," *Nómadas. Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales Y Jurídicas* 42, no. 2 (June 3, 2015), 50, https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_noma.2014.v42.n2.48777.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.

goodness and civility, and was no more than a mere object to the European subject observing and utilizing 'it.'

This argument suggests the *ego conquiro* could not have been constructed as it was, had it not been for the juxtaposition of European being with the American Other. This approach to the Other, required forcibly, that the newly 'discovered,' conquered and colonized Indian be absorbed into 'the same,' rather than simply eradicated. The *ego conquiro* operates not by widening the difference that separates and identifies people, but by doing everything in its power to homogenize existences by equating all of them to itself—submitting the Other through whatever means or treatment necessary. It aims toward the assimilation of the Other, the Indian, the underdeveloped or uncivilized, into its rational totality—hence creating the conditions for the jump to the *ego cogito* to come. Dussel writes:

> The modern ego has appeared in its confrontation with the non-ego; the inhabitants of newly discovered lands do not appear as Others, but as 'the same' to be conquered, colonized, modernized, civilized, as "material" for the modern ego. And it is thus, how the Europeans (the Brits in particular) transform themselves, (...) in "the missionaries of civilization around the world."[208]

Ego conquiro (I conquer) and *ego cogito* (I think) represent two modern approaches to the self, which were enacted in two separate moments. According to Dussel, there are two important phases of modernity. The first is defined by the *ego conquiro*, expressed in Cortes' and Pizarro's violent conquests, when the Other was totalized through violence to the body and, later, through coloniality into an instrument of labor or an object of eroticism. The second phase of modernity is expressed in Descartes' *ego cogito*. The 'I think' is, likewise, an act of domination. This domination is established by an epistemic hierarchy where the Europeans, identified as rational, intend to totalize the periphery of the uncivilized-irrational Other. Though these

[208] Dussel, *1492: El Encubrimiento Del Otro,"* 36.

historical episodes differ from each other, they make up the same modern thread, as evidenced in the Anti-Cartesian Meditations. The first modernity precedes the second, but also, and more importantly, creates the conditions for the second to occur.[209] Both incur in the same maltreatment of those in the periphery by exalting European being over and above the existence of all others, and hence utilizing violence to make away with alterity.

Modernity is a consequence of encountering the infinite: the infinite in the Other. Dussel's thesis proposes that "modernity as such was 'born' when Europe was in a position to pose itself against an other"[210] Unfortunately, Europe's encounter with the Other spiraled out of control into a reified constitution of the self that did not acknowledge the face of the Other with responsible ethicity—rather, for the most part, "constitute(d) itself as a unified ego exploring, conquering, colonizing an alterity that gave back an image of itself."[211]

I hope this chapter helps to justify my claim that modernity/coloniality is an example of approaching the problem of alterity by totalizing the Other into 'the same.' To do this, I presented four instances where this type of treatment was carried out. I have also offered a description of *ego conquiro* and *ego cogito* to explain the point from where the European internal subject emanates its beliefs on behaviors towards the Other, behaviors I call non-ethical or examples of ethicity.

[209] See Damián Pachón Soto, "Historiografía, Eurocentrismo Y Universalidad En Enrique Dussel," *Ideas Y Valores* LXI, no. 148 (April 2012): 37–58, 52.
[210] Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)," 66.
[211] Ibid.

Chapter III: Radical Alternatives in Education that are 'out-there' or Ana Cecilia's thoughts on *La Escuelita Zapatista*

This chapter will be radical—it will be radically other. In the pages that follow, I will explore a particular educational alternative to the paradigm of domination in order to achieve ethical face-to-face experiences. This alternative is out-there—really, really out-there. It is 'out-there' colloquially, as it is not common, but more importantly, it is 'out there' because it is outside of the center—it is a movement born from and for the periphery. It is also out there because the movement's participants recognized themselves as others—the Zapatistas, subjugated and forgotten people who reclaim their dignity through their actions. They present themselves to us as they are, and therefore, I claim, it is possible to consider that intersubjective experiences can be otherwise.

I will be learning about, working with, and (hopefully) enacting other ways of knowing. In particular, I will be engaging with the Zapatistas and their ethical and epistemic approach. My work will also be highly influenced by Levinas and his ethics. Hence, the way I will approach the Zapatistas and their movement will be novel. In the pages that follow, I will explain what I mean by this in detail. If my tone sounds 'reverential' it is because, in many ways, it is. In the first chapter, I explained the idea of "the height." Coming into contact with the Zapatistas via their narrative was my desire. I could have chosen to treat the knowledge in those narratives in many ways. I chose to push myself and gain experience working with narratives in a way that I could try to enact an ethic that is respectful and non-totalizing. Hence, I do not treat the Zapatistas as my object of study—rather, I try to position myself in something that could be like a face-to-face encounter, thus elevating them and their *Escuelita Zapatista* to 'the height.' From the height, they become my teachers. I learned about them from them.

Is this tone-deaf to the criticism[212] of the Zapatistas that others have pointed out? No, it is not… From my particular standpoint, once my interlocutors' otherness is disclosed, I do not look to see how to criticize them. Rather, I look inward—to understand what the disclosure of their alterity is letting me see in myself that is worthy of critique and change. I respond to the Zapatistas by demanding more of myself—not more of them. Their alterity, their otherness, is absolute and infinitely other to me—I may not change or alter it in any way, or I run the risk of totalizing them.

Lastly, I reiterate the initial foundation of this dissertation: the Other is absolutely other. I am determined to craft a piece where I intentionally and consciously treat the reader as the Other and recognize my own alterity—this chapter is and can only ever be my personal response. And I would insist that all pieces of writing, no matter what kind, are only ever and can only ever be personal responses from one person's interiority to the Other's exteriority. This is not intended to close off the reader—on the contrary, it is written with the premise that the reader's interiority is already absolutely infinite. I hope that at every point of the chapter the reader understands that I have written this piece mindful of an ethic that requires respect and a careful response to their gaze upon my words.

[212] Criticism of the Zapatistas comes not only from the 'right,' but is actually far-ranging. Throughout their almost 30 years of existence in the public eye, they have been cataloged as everything from a farce to a political ploy for the exchange of power in the 1994 electoral campaign. In an article titled "The Zapatistas of Chiapas: Challenges and Contradictions," Nuijten and van der Haar carefully review literature on the Zapatistas. My reading of their piece leads me to believe there are three central concerns when it comes to the Zapatistas: 1. The movement is not solely made up of the Indigenous people who have suffered the marginalization they wish to overcome. There has always been heavy involvement from the "San Cristobal diocese and political advisors from northern Mexico, entering the region with their own (long-term, abstract, and often utopian) agendas," and these agendas have considerably influenced the relations between the Indigenous population and the government. 2. Some claim that the movement has been "far less democratic than assumed and that it can be repressive towards people who are critical" of it. 3. There are still problems within the movement related to traditional gender roles. See Monique Nuijten and Gemma Van Der Haar, "The Zapatistas of Chiapas: Challenges and Contradictions," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 68 (April 2000).

3.1 *Congruencia* [Congruence]

When I outlined the chapters of this dissertation, I planned to analyze two radical alternatives in education (*La Escuelita Zapatista* and *Universidad de la Tierra*), which countered the totalization of the central hegemony in the space of learning/teaching. I was very keen to fall in line with Enrique Dussel, who proposed that it is necessary to **study** these real alternative experiences (the *Zapatistas*) with more attention.[213] As I wrote in the introduction, the last chapter would be the most pedagogic, for I would use this space to describe the educational elements of these two experiences and relate them back to an ethical incarnation of Levinas' thought. This purpose, however, became complicated as I vehemently pondered how I was supposed to write a chapter on the Other without incurring the very transgression Levinas warned about. How could I write this chapter with respect to the Zapatistas in an ethical manner that represents my interest and curiosity whilst also fulfilling the requirements my academic institution expects of a dissertation?

This was not a new problem for me. *Congruencia*. That is the word I have kept hearing in my mind for more than 5 years now. *Congruencia,* Ana Cecilia, *congruencia*. How can I write a dissertation when writing a dissertation is clearly, in Levinasian terms, a totalization of the Other? How can I write a dissertation when I believe in "learning alternatives" and an education otherwise based on Ivan Illich's deschooling principles?[214] This second question was what has

[213] Enrique Dussel, "El 'Giro Descolonizador' Desde El Pueblo Y Hacia La Segunda Emancipación," accessed March 10, 2022, 39. http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/ar/libros/mexico/xochimil/coloquio/Docs/Mesa4/Enrique%20Dussel%202.pdf.

[214] The ideas of Ivan Illich have greatly inspired me over the years. Like most, my first encounter with his work was reading Deschooling Society. In this book, he appeared to me to have a critical vision that other educators lacked. It became apparent to me then, that most people want to change education by making schooling a better, more efficient system. However, Ivan Illich saw, and I wholeheartedly agree, that the system itself was a societal myth that needed to be understood in a new light. He did something that greatly resonated with me: he questioned the unquestionable stature of schooling as a modern fact of life. I vehemently work toward re-envisioning learning and society without schooling as its particular staple. See Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harrow Books, 1972).

kept me from finishing the dissertation and graduating—the question that led me to leave the program for over two years. But now that I am back, and now that I am this close to finishing, it is the same principle that haunts me: *congruencia*… It is not like me to preach one thing and do another.

Writing this chapter was an even bigger conundrum because of the way I was trying to make ideas commune: it was not only an ethical problem but a methodological one as well. Initially, I had set out to demonstrate that *La Escuelita Zapatista* and *Unitierra* were enactments of Levinas' ethics. However, I became weary that my claim was not feasible, nor could I support it. After many conversations on this matter, I was advised to use *La Escuelita Zapatista* and *Unitierra* as real-life examples of learning alternatives that highlight conceptual considerations of Levinas' first philosophy. I would describe both endeavors and then proceed to explain how certain educational actions could be viewed as representative of differing worldviews or ethical approaches because they embraced the Other in their alterity.

As you have already read in the introduction, by carefully tracing Subcomandante Marcos' intellectual biography, I was able to identify that his thinking was influenced and shaped by continental philosophy and Latin American philosophy. This realization made learning about the Zapatistas' pedagogical practices even more appealing to me. At this point, it is precise to say that because of the philosophical weight of Subcomandante Marcos' thought, along with all the information I gathered on Zapatista practices, I chose to focus the chapter on the *Escuelita Zapatista* only (leaving my thoughts on *Unitierra* to be explored elsewhere). However, the problem of how to approach the chapter was still looming over my shoulders. Especially, after having done so much research on the Zapatista movement. This social

enactment of alterity, the Zapatista's otherness, requested dignity[215]—a dignity I felt I stripped away from them each time I wrote a sentence describing their toil.

It was, however, the people of Chiapas themselves who eventually taught me how to treat them. I did not learn this directly from face-to-face with the Zapatistas. Hence, this might be a good place for an important disclaimer: as of now, I have only ever encountered the Zapatistas through their writing and the information others have written about them. I have never been to Zapatista territory… though I am still trying very hard to get invited into their space. My words are based on my readings of their work since that is what is available to me at this moment.

My study of the Zapatistas has been one of the most powerful experiences of my life. Another reason why my conscience kept sounding the alarm (*¡congruencia!¡congruencia!*) was because of the profound effect reading Zapatismo had on me. This was not a run-of-the-mill academic exercise, and mine was no ordinary relationship with an object of study. I was invested ethically: with my existence honoring and recognizing theirs. I find it hard to describe my encounter—it is not a face-to-face because it is not an event enacted between me and them in the here-and-now. Rather, I believe they speak for themselves with literature so masterfully crafted that it teaches me—it teaches me from its height. Their writing is a manifestation of their alterity that is achieved with such genuineness that it demands desire, interest, and respect from me, the reader, or the learner.

I believe it is, in fact, in their particular way of writing that one begins to get a glimpse into not only their otherness but also into their unwavering commitment to ethical manifestations of their alterity, which do not dominate nor conquer but teach[216] (always teach). It is inspired by

[215] Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, "PRIMERA DECLARACIÓN DE LA SELVA LACANDONA," Enlace Zapatista, January 1, 1994, https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1994/01/01/primera-declaracion-de-la-selva-lacandona/.
[216] See Levinas, *Totality and Infinit*y, 171.

them and their way of telling their own stories that I take my cue. They have taught me how to write responsibly (as in responding to the Other) by modeling this particular mode of written transmission. Hence, I believe I have found a way to reconcile my need to write a chapter on Zapatismo for my dissertation and stay true to my ethical ideals. In so doing, this chapter is not only written to inform the reader about Zapatismo, but to be a true testament, an enactment, and an incarnation of Levinas' ethics, Dussel's pedagogics, and Zapatista practices.

The Zapatistas try not to write about the experiences of others, they try not to theorize about the Other. The literary works I am talking about are mostly made up of first-person accounts of events. Gloria Muoz Ramrez, for example, approaches the history of the Zapatista movement in her book *EZLN: 20 y 10, El fuego y la palabra*, in which she carefully weaves together first-person accounts from EZLN participants in the 1994 military engagement. Another example can be found in the workbooks carefully crafted for *La Escuelita Zapatista*.[217] While I will cover this at length, I need to establish early on in this chapter that I will be mimicking this style and offering a first-person account of a very significant event in my life: my encounter with Zapatista philosophy and ethics through my readings of their works.

With the treatment of my relationship to the Zapatistas expressed in this manner, I wish to contribute to the justification of my thesis statement and try to answer Levinas' central question: how can the same … enter into a relationship with an other without immediately divesting it of its alterity?[218] If, as I have proposed, modernity/coloniality promotes actions that approach the problem of alterity from conquest, thus, totalizing the Other into 'the same,' then aligning

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[217] *Gobierno Autónomo I*. Cuaderno de Texto de Primer Grado Del Curso de "La Libertad Según L@S Zapatistas" (Chiapas, México, 2013); *Gobierno Autónomo II*. Cuaderno de Texto de Primer Grado Del Curso de "La Libertad Según L@S Zapatistas" (Chiapas, México, 2013); *Resistencia Autónoma*. Cuaderno de Texto de Primer Grado Del Curso de "La Libertad Según L@S Zapatistas" (Chiapas, México, 2013); *La Participación de las Mujeres en el Gobierno Autónomo*. Cuaderno de Texto de Primer Grado Del Curso de "La Libertad Según L@S Zapatistas" (Chiapas, México, 2013).

[218] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 38.

oneself with liberatory post-colonial theories will promote ethical behaviors—behaviors respectfully responsive in the interaction with the Other. I believe there are many worthwhile examples in the world today that highlight relationships "otherwise" and education "otherwise." Learning from the Zapatistas, however, offers a double glimpse into these possibilities. First, because of how the Zapatistas manifest their ethical considerations. Second, because of how the Zapatistas have inspired me to write—responsibly in response (dialogically).

3.2 Crying Zapatismo

I believe the Zapatistas' particular literary style has ethical implications. It also has a sensibility that seems to strike a chord with a part of myself that is prior to rational and thematic comprehension. Sub Marcos' witty yet raw commentary is moving. It has moved me to tears more than once, perplexing those working close by me, but more importantly, teaching me lessons on the power of the written word. Sometimes, Sub Marcos likes to write using myths, and the central character of these myths is *el viejo Antonio*. In the myth titled "*El león mata mirando,*"[219] I understood Sub Marcos suggesting he, and the Zapatistas (following Antonio's advice), could see into their hearts and the strength of their hearts. I read: "*... el hombre que sabe mirarse el corazón no ve la fuerza del león, ve la fuerza de su corazón…*"[220] [the man who knows how to gaze into his heart does not see the lion's strength, he sees the strength of his own heart.] I believe this narration was about finding one's heart. I clearly felt communication between Sub and I was passing through his heart to mine and not from his mind to my understanding.

[219] Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos and Beatriz Aurora Castedo, *Los Relatos Del Viejo Antonio* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Radio Universidad De Chile, 2012), 32.
[220] Ibid.

Preparing a dissertation chapter is hard. It has, however, proven even harder since I needed to constantly wipe the tears from my eyes. Zapatista's writing (especially Sub's writing) is so moving that I could only weep as I read it. Yes, I wept. I wept with true sorrow. As I read about the armed conflict in 1994, I wept; as I read about the 10 years of a clandestine organization, I wept; and as I analyzed their philosophical stance on politics, democracy, and liberty, I could feel the pearls of tears rolling down my cheeks—in sorrow, yes: but also with hope. I gathered such an emotional response was because what Supmarcos was conveying was a glimpse into their reality—an unveiling of their alterity.

Their reality was bleak, and the prospect of their lives was very dark; marred by illness and death, poverty, and little to no access to a dignified way of life. For the spectator, accepting this reality is harsh; and turning a blind eye to people who have been disenfranchised is confrontational. I believed my tears were also a reflection of the way I was open to receiving the Zapatista ideals. I identified with and sympathized with the disenfranchisement. I could feel the weight of subjugation—as if I were the one in their place.

There is an observable philosophical core from which these writings take their shape. However, it must be that, as is proposed by the Zapatistas, they speak the truth, and the truth is that which is said from the heart. I am genuinely in awe of these people who have so eloquently put into words how their hearts feel and then act as their hearts move them to—a movement towards the wellbeing of their collectivity that (they know) is only one within the many.

3.3 My thoughts on how the Zapatistas write

Reading through the literature the Zapatistas have crafted, especially the works of Subcomandante Marcos, is moving in a way that cannot be described with any other word than emotional. Responding emotionally (rather than rationally), however, does not seem to be just an

accidental response from the reader—but a response that is deliberately elicited by the writers. I am not scared to say that Zapatista's writing is a manifestation of their ethical considerations towards the Other. If writing about the Other is a totalizing procedure, then writing as the Zapatistas do is an ethical approach to the problem of communication and, ultimately, education.

As I started my research on *La Escuelita Zapatista,* I read many secondary sources on the topic. It was not until I started to read Zapatista literature directly that I identified a visible common style. This *style,* however, manifests certain beliefs that promote the idea that their writings are not only communicative in what they say but also in how they say it. How they write is a clear embodiment of their ethical inclinations in the treatment of the Other.

Reviewing the literature, I found three particular ways of writing. The first is through myth—mimicking the traditional way knowledge was transmitted (and constructed through a different epistemic sensibility) in Indigenous cultures. The second is a particular use of satire by Subcomandante Marcos in his communiques, where he humorously but incisively criticizes particular political entities in order to desecrate and discredit them. It is important to note that when it comes to confronting established power structures that have disenfranchised the Indigenous population, Submarcos seems to mask the rage of those affected with humor. However, his writings are no less explosive. When positioning themselves face-to-face with those who have unjustly used them for their own benefit, the Zapatistas demonstrate they are no longer *agachados* [heads hanging low], but rise up to own their history and change the outcome through liberation vis-a-vis their oppressors. Finally, the third style is the most relevant for my project. As I see it, it is an ethical approach embedded in a stylistic manifestation, a collection of first-person narrations of events that overtly highlight underlying (personal and communal)

values. I see this style in the workbooks used in *La Escuelita Zapatista*. I will talk about this at length further on.

3.4 The Zapatista Movement

Things we learn become anchored on past experiences. This was very evident to me when I started to read about the Zapatista insurrection that took place in 1994, as I started to vividly recall my first 'encounter' with them. I was a 10-year-old girl when I first heard of the movement. The memory of the moment I heard the news of their uprising is very clear in my mind. I had spent the holidays with my family in Texas, and by the beginning of the year, we were readying ourselves to go back home to Mexico City. I sat at the foot of the stairway that led to my grandparents' bedroom as the adults around me were gathering the luggage. It was then and there that they spoke of things I now know I knew nothing about (and neither did they).

During my research on the matter, some 28 years later from this scene in Texas, I learned that while I celebrated my holiday, an important social movement erupted violently but premeditatedly, one which had gestated for a decade deep in the Jungla Lacandona in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. I had no knowledge of the long gestation period of the EZLN (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*), which was founded in 1983 as a clandestine organization that initially promoted Marxist ideals. The first ten years of the EZLN were used by its leaders to talk to the townspeople about the bad government and invite them to organize. (The bad government was something my parents also talked about—and something I heard about in my teens, and then commented on as an adult. Mexico has a history of "bad government.")

I gather that their first years of the clandestine movement were marked by moving in the darkness and hiding their true identity. They spread their ideological beliefs by word of mouth and traveled from town to town at night, so as not to be seen. Their numbers grew as they

recruited more and more townspeople—most of whom were Indigenous—with a socialist agenda. However, it quickly took on an ideology of its own. Those being recruited became the teachers, the Indigenous townspeople—the downtrodden, those ignored and forgotten by the center—, and they wove their millennial knowledge into the socialist narrative, hence becoming the drivers of this, their liberatory movement.

Instead of the recruiters indoctrinating the people with their own views of a European tradition, these people's epistemological, ontological, and social traditions became very attractive to the organizers. A communal approach to organizing was adopted because the townspeople would only allow a dialogue with the recruiters if it was on their terms. It was thus that the *guerrilleros* of the EZLN realized they needed to learn from the people first, and only after the people had allowed them to, could they cooperate in an endeavor that would be communal. The Zapatistas realized they first needed to learn—and in order to learn, they needed to ask many questions.[221] And so those 10 years elapsed: with the Marxist-inspired *guerrilleros* turning into learners of the autochthonous tradition, creating a community with the people of the many isolated towns, and planning (what they thought would be) a revolutionary war that would eventually take place on the first day of 1994.

On the eve of December 31st, 1993, the Zapatistas declared war on Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the Mexican president in office. The declaration of war is included in The First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle.[222] In this declaration, the EZLN expressed their concern for the wellbeing of their community and the Mexican people in general and their reasoning for consciously choosing to start the war. Even though the EZLN took seven municipal chairs on the first of January in 1994, their official arms battle with the Mexican government was short-lived:

[221]Dussel, "El 'Giro Descolonizador' Desde El Pueblo y Hacia La Segunda Emancipación," 44.
[222] Marcos, "First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," 1993.

only ten days. After the cease-fire, there would still be violence toward the Zapatistas and a real armed conflict that has persisted in different ways till today. They decided not to lead this revolution with an arms race, but rather to embark on a decades-long social movement (I would dare to call it a social experiment) centered on community dialogue, resistance, and autonomy as the recipe for long-term political change.

As a socio-political and military grouping,[223] the Zapatistas are observably well-documented and strategic in their organization. Contrary to other movements in Mexican history that have been less learned, the Zapatistas developed a robust theory of political-ethical knowledge and prepared conscientiously for their proposed revolution. A task that took them a decade of immense clandestine grassroots organizing. Three important characteristics are paramount to this movement. Firstly, even though it is heavily inspired by Marxist theory, its main category of struggle is ethnicity; second, the conviction (anchored in traditional Indigenous knowledge[224]) that sovereignty must reside with the people; and lastly, a resistance to the neoliberal politics being practiced in Mexico at that time. Their call for "Democracy, Justice, and Liberty" as their central ideals[225] has ramifications and can be identified as interacting with the central characteristics of their political and ethical philosophy as a whole.

The words of Enrique Dussel on the matter evoke particular images of an ethical (non-objectification) belief system deeply embedded in Zapatista philosophy and subjacent to their practice. Dussel writes: "(Zapatismo) *Es todo un enfrentamiento ante la pretendida civilización occidental, la Modernidad, el eurocentrismo, la superioridad criolla-blanca y hasta mestiza*."[226]

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[223] See Xochitl Leyva Solano, "De Las Cañadas a Europa: Niveles, Actores Y Discursos Del Nuevo Movimiento Zapatista," *Saberes Y Razones. Desacatos* 1 (1999), 3.
[224] See Dussel's analysis of this fact in Enrique Dussel, "El 'Giro Descolonizador' Desde El Pueblo y Hacia La Segunda Emancipación," 39.
[225] Leyva Solano, "De Las Cañadas a Europa: Niveles, Actores y Discursos Del Nuevo Movimiento Zapatista," 3.
[226] Dussel, "El 'Giro Descolonizador' Desde El Pueblo y Hacia La Segunda Emancipación," 44.

[Zapatismo opposes Western civilization, Modernity, Eurocentrism, white-creole supremacy, and even Mestizo supremacy.] First of all, is the fact that Zapatismo is itself, in itself, an entire system: there is a unity that sets it apart from other struggles and gives the movement both interiority and exteriority. Second, the way Dussel is framing it places Zapatismo as the quintessential Other to the contemporary socio-political status quo. He mindfully uses the word 'confrontation' to paint a picture where the Zapatistas and the center are face-to-face with each other—in their total otherness to each other: 'in confrontation.' This confrontation, this particularly forceful face-to-face, springs from the Zapatistas' urge to be seen by the system that dismisses them.

In the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, Sub Marcos asserted their (Indigenous) 'being' and, by doing so, he created a circumstance where the face of the Indigenous Other abruptly interrupted neoliberal Mexican politics as usual. The second and riskier way Zapatistas propitiated this face-to-face was with the armed combat that started on the next day after he penned this statement. El Sub wrote the following in order that there be no question as to who the interlocutor was (especially since it is of the utmost importance that the category of struggle is identified—it is not a class struggle, nor a struggle of the workers vis-a-vis the owners of the means of production—it is a race struggle so complex that it has prevailed since the conquest in a structure that uses the invisibility of the Indigenous as its main strategy for domination):

> We are a product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism, then to promulgate our constitution and expel the French empire from our soil, and later the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz denied us the just application of the Reform laws and the people rebelled and leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged, poor men just like us. [...] We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation. The dispossessed, we are millions, and we thereby call upon our brothers and sisters to join this struggle as the only path, so that we will not die of hunger due to the insatiable ambition of a 70-year dictatorship led by a clique of traitors that represent the most conservative and sell-out groups.[227]

[227] Marcos, "First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," 1993.

Furthermore, he eloquently frames the historical power structures (all of which are extremely complex) that they are confronted with on that pivotal date and whose being they wish to confront directly:

> They are the same ones that opposed Hidalgo and Morelos, the same ones that betrayed Vicente Guerrero, the same ones that sold half our country to the foreign invader, the same ones that imported a European prince to rule our country, the same ones that formed the "scientific" Porfirsta dictatorship, the same ones that opposed the Petroleum Expropriation, the same ones that massacred the railroad workers in 1958 and the students in 1968, the same ones that today take everything from us, absolutely everything.

By establishing their existence beyond a shadow of a doubt, both through written communication and with the irruption of the war, the Zapatistas started a dialogue with the dominating center that is still going strong. They have literally and metaphorically fought to establish democratic and just political governance through resistance and communal deliberation. They have incarnated their theory with their practice in the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* for the past 20 years and have, as Dussel put it, given onlookers around the world "lots to think about."[228] I think about them often, and in this case, I think about one of their multiple expressions of communal living (*convivencia*)—*La Escuelita Zapatista*. I wish to learn as much as I can about his pedagogical experiment in order to understand how education could be otherwise.

3.5 *La Escuelita Zapatista*

After the success of our first LAPES Symposium in 2014, we held our second LAPES Symposium in 2015 with a few variations on the original. Additional to our four main presentations, we would include two workshops. The person who offered one of these workshops was a man called George Caffentzis. The title of the workshop was "Reports from the Escuelita:

[228] Dussel, "El 'Giro Descolonizador' Desde El Pueblo y Hacia La Segunda Emancipación," 30.

A Discussion of the Zapatistas' Epistemology" and it was included in the LAPES journal, Lápiz no. 02, under the title "*Zapatismo Hoy.*"[229] I edited this number of the journal and became better acquainted with the ideas of the presenter. However, it was that initial moment at the workshop in 2015 that opened my eyes. Also noteworthy is the fact that he came to the workshop with a pillar of books he gave away. The book, *Midnight Notes Goes to School,* is a permanent fixture on my nightstand (besides none other than Rousseau's Emile). This small collection of four people's narratives of their experience at *La Escuelita Zapatista* unbounded my curiosity.

Until that moment, I had never been exposed to the philosophy of the Zapatistas and even less to their movement framed as an example of a worthwhile alternative in matters of education. Everything I knew about the Zapatistas till then had been mediated by the neoliberal-capitalist (very classist) society in which I lived. What I 'knew' about them was information that came from newscasts or public opinion—and the public whose opinion I had ever listened to was definitely not aligned with the movement. Hence, I sat in awe of what I was listening to. It was as though I heard about them for the first time—because, for the first time, the lens through which the movement was being presented to me was a completely different one.

Thus, George Caffentzis introduced me to Zapatismo. He also introduced me to *La Escuelita Zapatista.* Though my interest was sparked, my academic topics of study were different at that time. In the years that followed that workshop, a series of events took place (both personal and professional) that would eventually lead me back to *La Escuelita Zapatista*—and I am today, unexpectedly, putting it at the heart of one of the most important intellectual exercises of my life. Though I did not attend, I have learned very much about and from the Zapatistas through this pedagogical experiment. In the pages that follow, I wish to share all the thoughts

[229] George Caffentzis, "Zapatismo Hoy," ed. Cecilia Diego, *Lápiz* 02 (2015): 154–57.

and work I have done in order to view *La Escuelita Zapatista* as an enactment of a novel way of relating to others—one that is ethical, one that highlights education otherwise.

The EZLN invited people from all over the world to participate in their *Escuelita Zapatista* in 2013 and 2014. Invitations were sent out to a wide array of people. Among the invitees were students and intellectuals from prominent universities (for example, Oxford, Cambridge, Berkeley, Stanford, Chicago, Yale, and Harvard[230]), grassroots organizers and activists, and even political prisoners.[231] Some invitees chose to decline, some chose to accept, and some invited more 'friends' along.[232] Of course, those who wanted to bring their own guests or family members needed to clear the invitation with the Zapatistas first.

The *Escuelita* took place twenty years after their initial public uprising. Much had changed in those years. The Zapatistas had consolidated themselves as an example of resistance and autonomy. They wanted to share their experiences and learning. This event took place in three sessions over the second half of 2013 and the early days of 2014 (which coincided with the exact anniversary of the uprising). The first iteration took place from August 11th to August 17th, the second from December 24th to December 30th, and the final from January 2nd to January 8th, 2014.[233]

La Escuelita Zapatista was anything but a traditional school and offered a very radical (from the roots) alternative to organized learning. For seven days, including the days of arrival

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[230] Jesus Aldabia Olvera, "La Escuelita Zapatista: Enseñanzas Para El Mundo," *Revista Proceso*, September, 2013, https://www.proceso.com.mx/internacional/2013/9/16/la-escuelita-zapatista-ensenanzas-para-el-mundo-123482.html
[231] Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos to L@s adherentes a la Sexta en México y el Mundo and L@s estudiantes de la Escuelita Zapatista, "L@S CONDISCÍPUL@S II. Faltan L@S: L"S PRES"S POLÍTI"S," Letter, June 2013.
[232] See Peter Linebaugh et al., *Midnight Notes Goes to School : Report from the Zapatista Escuelita* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2014).
[233] Isaín Mandujano, "Más de 2 Mil Parten a La Tercera Y Última Sesión de La Escuelita Zapatista," Chiapasparalelo, January 3, 2014, https://www.chiapasparalelo.com/noticias/chiapas/2014/01/mas-de-2-mil-parten-a-la-tercera-y-ultima-sesion-de-la-escuelita-zapatista/.

and departure, participants would experience life alongside Zapatista families who went about their days as usual. The students flew into San Cristobal de las Casas, in the southern state of Chiapas, Mexico, and from there they would be driven far into the towns where the experience of *La Escuelita* would take place. In what follows, I offer my thoughts on what I studied about the experiment, concluding that it may be taken as an example of the many possibilities of education. *La Escuelita Zapatista* taught me about education and life otherwise.

3.6 My Reading of Subcomandante Marcos' *Votán II*

I had outlined my dissertation to be written in three chapters. The first chapter, on Levinas, would be the most philosophical. The second chapter, on how decolonial thinkers view modernity as a totalization of the Other, would be a middle ground between Chapters 1 and 3. This last chapter was set to be the one centered on liberatory practices of learning. From the most philosophical to the most pedagogical. However, these are just categories that helped me create the framework I needed to get on with the academic exercise. More and more I realize just how steeped in philosophy the Zapatista practices are—and how our own practices are.

As per my studies, I carry with me a theoretical background that establishes a way of thinking about reality. All reality is first and foremost educational; and any educational reality (hence all reality) is constituted by seven elements.[234] The actors (participants), the aims (goals and objectives—results), the content, learning strategies, resources, the place, and the schedule—are all essential and necessary components for curricular design and the implementation of educational praxis. These components are also present in informal education: in life as education.

[234] Elvia Marveya Villalobos Pérez-Cortés, *Didáctica Integrativa Y El Proceso de Aprendizaje* (México: Trillas, 2002), 147-206.

They are, therefore, identifiable in the learning experiment that was *La Escuelita Zapatista*: an experiment that carefully curated the content that would be transmitted to the participants.

The central academic exercise that I carried out in my head during my readings of *La Escuelita Zapatista* drew upon this structure—a piece of prior knowledge that helped me interpret the elements of learning. I was elated by Subcomandante Marcos' overview, in his communique "Votán II,"[235] of what could be construed under our curricular gaze as the pedagogical programming for the event. This communique is witty and heartwarming at the same time and is written in a playful tone that highlights his critique of traditional schooling whilst actually establishing a structure for learning. As an educator, a pedagogue, a philosopher, and a person interested in education-otherwise, this communique is central to my query as it combines the elements of every educational reality but construes them in a novel way. The communique inspired and delighted me, which is why I offer a synthesized summary of what I understood about each of the pedagogical elements.

As mentioned before, the 'teachers' were the Zapatistas—as individuals and as a community as a whole—, and those being taught were the invitees from all over the world. From what I can gather, it seems the invitees did not know what to expect and started speculating about the encounter. Hence, in this communique, Sub Marcos advises that participants need only have one particularity: being open to listening.[236] As the piece goes on, it is evident that there is much to unpack. In order to be open to listening, learners must know how to look and listen.[237] Sub makes it clear that there have been people who have been eager to talk and tell them (this might mean the Zapatistas, but it could also mean Indigenous peoples since the Conquest) what they

[235] Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, "VOTÁN II. L@S GUARDIAN@S," Enlace Zapatista, July 30, 2013, https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2013/07/30/votan-ii-ls-guardians/.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Ibid.

should do. In fact, he says that there have been too many who have been eager to do so. To be admitted, participants will need to have: "Indisposition to talk and judge; Disposition to listen and look; An open heart."[238] These characteristics describe the openness needed to greet alterity and learn from it.

Traditional and mainstream categories of societal division are ruled out as having any importance. "*No importa entonces su raza, su edad, su género, su preferencia sexual, su lugar de origen, su religión, su escolaridad, su estatura, su peso, su apariencia física, su equipo, su 'antigüedad' mirando al zapatismo,... ni su calzado o descalzo.*"[239] [Therefore, your race, age, gender, sexual preference, place of origin, religion, schooling, height, weight, physical appearance, your team, your time looking al Zapatismo, ... not even your shoes or bare feet matter.] It is not important where participants stand in relation to hierarchies of power according to the center (race, age, gender, sexual preference, place of origin, religion, and schooling), but that their minds (and hearts) be prepared to encounter the Other. For this encounter to be genuine, Sub emphasizes that the essential feature one must bring is "already incorporated into your person and can be found, starting from the neck, down and to the left."[240] People with heart, with knowledge of their heart, people who have looked into their hearts are the ones who are prepared for this journey into the Zapatista's world. Reading about this prerequisite reminds me of the myth "*El león mata mirando.*"[241] In this myth, Sub Marcos listened to *el viejo Antonio* as he entertained him with a story that alludes to human relations and ways of seeing each other. El *viejo Antonio* claims that lions kill with their gaze: as the animal being hunted down can only see his reflexión in the lion's eyes and therefore sees himself as small and weak. The moral is that

[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Marcos and Castedo, *Los Relatos Del Viejo Antonio*, 29.

those who gaze inward are not persuaded of their status as "small and weak."[242] Hence, what I take away from my reading of *Votan II* in relation to "*El león mata mirando*" is that those who measure themselves in the gaze of the center (by their race, their age, their gender, sexual preference, etc.) are not ready to forgo the crushing exigencies of the hierarchy of power and, therefore, it would be complicated for them to see things as they are in their alterity—in their separateness of being.

Zapatistas as teachers epitomize 'the height' of those who teach in different ways and scenarios. All variations are very well thought out and deliberately in line with the ethics of the Other. First, each Zapatista will teach with their example and by proximity to the invitees who will be spending their days partaking in their everyday life. Second, as conversationalists who will engage intellectually with the participants, and thirdly, the most remarkable iteration of the Zapatista teacher in the *Escuelita* is the figure of the *Votán.* Though the origin of the word is controversial, the meaning ascribed to it by the Zapatistas is "*El corazón que habla*."[243] Each participant will have a *Votán* assigned to them, and the *Votán* will embody different notions of what it means to be a teacher. They are caregivers and guides, helpers, transmitters of knowledge, and models of autonomy and resistance.[244] I will speak more at length about the Votán and the relation of this figure to pedagogics and face-to-face encounters when I develop my thinking on learning strategies.

The aim of such a magnificent common experience can be misconstrued as an intent to transmit and acquire knowledge, values, and abilities related to the Zapatista approach to autonomy and resistance. I fall in line with Gustavo Esteva, who wrote on the matter: "*No nos*

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[242] Ibid, 29-34.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Gustavo Esteva, "Y Sí, Aprendimos," *La Jornada*, August 19, 2013, https://www.jornada.com.mx/2013/08/19/opinion/018a2pol.

invitaron para educarnos en una doctrina y mucho menos para tirarnos línea."[245] [They did not invite us to learn about a doctrine, let alone lecture us on it.] What the Zapatistas offered was "*la compartición*."[246] *La compartición* (which could be loosely translated as partaking in the experience of sharing) lacks the characteristics of aims that are imposed from the outside. Something is shared without the expectation of anyone gaining anything other than the experience of sharing itself. In this case, it is the Zapatistas' intent to share their own construction of what "freedom" means to them, not so participants can take a test and answer what freedom is for the Zapatistas, but for the invitees to ponder what their own notion of freedom is.[247] They procured a shared experience just in case something they were doing could be of interest or useful to others.

The subject matter is, hence, the construction of freedom, exemplified by the Zapatista's quest for autonomy in resistance. It is a notion that each participant will come to on their own, based on their prior life experience, and the experience of observing Zapatista life first hand. There was not a common opus or trope. Not even within the Zapatistas (the workbook exemplifies how this was done). The content learned was contingent on the experience itself, depending on how all the elements came together in differing ways for each participant.

The descriptions in the communique that made me laugh the most were those Sub wrote about the materials and resources that would be needed and used. I'll enumerate the instances where he speaks of such things:[248]

1. *Así que no compre nada especial (leí que alguien sólo tiene unos viejos tenis, chido). Traiga cualquier cuaderno y un lapicero o lápiz. No es obligatorio que cargue usted con*

[245] Ibid.
[246] Jerome Baschet, "La Escuelita Zapatista Y El Contagio de La Autonomía," in *Aprender Escuchando: Autonomía, Educación Y Guerrilla En Chiapas Y Kurdistán* (Barcelona, Spain: Pensaré Cartoneras, 2015), 33–52, 36.
[247] Marcos, "Votán II," 2013.
[248] Ibid.

su computadora, esmarfon, tableta o lo que se use ahora, pero puede traerlos si gusta. Eso sí, no hay señal de celular en el lugar donde le tocará. Hay internet en algunos caracoles pero su velocidad es, cómo le diré… como "pegaso", la montura de Durito. Sí, puede traer su como-se-llame donde escucha música. Sí, puede traer cámara y grabadora. Sí, puede grabar y tomar fotos y videos pero sólo según las reglas que el Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés les va a hacer saber. Sí, puede traer su osito de peluche o equivalente.

[So don't go buy anything special (I read that someone only has a pair of old tennis shoes, cool) Bring whatever notebook you have and a pen or pencil. It is not compulsory to bring your computer, smartphone, tablet, or whatever people are using these days, but you may do so if you wish. Of course, there will be no cellular data where you will be posted. There is internet in some of the school buildings, but the speed is well… slow. Yes, you can bring your, (what is it called?) where you listen to music. Yes, you may bring a camera and a video camera. Yes, you may take photographs and videos, but only if you abide by the rules that Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés will lay out. Yes, you may bring your teddy bear or its equivalent.]

2. *Cosas que sí le pueden ser útiles: una lámpara de mano. Su cepillo de dientes y una toalla (por si le dan ganas y es posible bañarse). Al menos una muda de ropa, por si se bate de lodo. Sus medicinas, si le son necesarias y se las ha recetado alguien capacitado. Una bolsa de plástico para sus identificaciones y su dinero (ambas cosas siempre traerlas consigo –la identificación sólo se la van a pedir en el registro para ver si usted es usted). Otra bolsa de plástico para el material de estudio que le van a entregar. Y su ropa (interior —si usa— y exterior) también póngase en bolsas de plástico.*

   [Things that could be useful: a flashlight. Your toothbrush and a towel (in case you want and can shower). At least one change of clothes, in case you fall in the mud. Your medicine, if necessary and has been prescribed by a licensed caregiver. A plastic bag for your ID and your money (have these with you at all times—your ID will be asked for at check-in to make sure you are yourself). Another plastic bag for the study materials you will be given. And your clothes (underwear—if you use it—and outerwear) also in a plastic bag.]

3. *Recuerde: puede traer todo lo que quiera, pero todo lo que traiga lo va a tener que cargar usted. Así que nada de que "me voy a llevar el piano por si me da tiempo de practicar el do-re-mi-fa-sol-la". Y no, tampoco puede traer su Xbox, ps3, wii, ni esa vieja consola de Atari.*

   [Remember: you can bring whatever you want with you, but you will be responsible for carrying it. So, no "I'll take this piano in case I have time to practice the do-re-mi-fa-sol-la." And no, you may not bring your Xbox, ps3, wii, not even your old Atari.]

However, the participants would need a particular pedagogical tool that was developed for the experience and which I will talk about at length: the workbooks. In order to cover the cost of those workbooks, attendees needed to bring the required amount of "*cien pesotes*."[249]

There are many learning strategies promoted in *La Escuelita Zapatista.* The three most relevant for my analysis are: their work with the *cuadernillos de escuela*, their one-on-one time with the *Votán*, and the time spent partaking in everyday life activities with the families assigned to them. I will work heavily to understand these in light of Levinasian ethics in the last part of this chapter. For now, it is important to mention them as unique and separate parts of the experience that enriched students' understanding of Autonomous Governance and Resistance. These three strategies work together by encouraging the participants to enact and conceive of different ways of relating to one another—ways that lead to education-otherwise, not because of a novel way to approach pedagogy, but a new proposal for pedagogics in Dusselian terms.

The place destined for learning is not an architectural structure, as it would be in a traditional school setting. Rather, the 'place' is the community—not the physical space where the community lives, but the people themselves, the teachers and students who form the collective.[250] In fact, the geographical places where the learning will take place varied as students were sent off into different towns, and some stayed in San Cristobal de las Casas. There is no classroom, no chalkboard, no one professor at the head of the class[251]—their space is created by the group of people with whom you experience the moment.

Lastly, *La Escuelita Zapatista*'s school schedules were null. There was no set time for learning, as learning takes place around the clock, in every interaction, in every moment of

[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.

solitude, in every thought and word. "You will be in school at all hours and every day of your stay."[252] The schedule students followed was not one based on parceling out their knowledge, but rather had to do with the lifestyle and activities the families they stayed with had. Students followed the times the families had already established for their tasks like fetching firewood, going to the *milpa*, to the river, cooking, eating, and resting (as well as getting tired).[253]

3.7 Zapatistas in the Height

I wanted to culminate the dissertation by pointing directly to a few (there are more) very specific pedagogical practices from *La Escuelita Zapatista* that best help me understand and highlight the enactment of Levinas' ethics and Dusselian pedagogics. As I mentioned before, for the remainder of this chapter I will be explaining the relations I see between three particular 'learning strategies' implemented by the Zapatistas in *La Escuelita* and the fundamental premises of ethics as a first philosophy. I shall divide this section in two, first offering a reading of the *cuadernillos de trabajo*, and lastly interpreting the work done by the *Votán* and the experience of communal living and working alongside Zapatista families.

a) Los cuadernillos de trabajo

At the onset of the course, each participant received a package with the workbooks they had paid "*cien pesotes*"[254] for. In a strict sense, this was the only compulsory reading for the "course." The Zapatistas used traditional school jargon to introduce a critical stance on educational practices, and the workbooks were an example of how something called a "workbook" was reimagined in light of their own pedagogy and ethical practices of respect

[252] Ibid.
[253] Iibd.
[254] Iibd.

toward alterity. If one looks at them, they do look like regular workbooks utilized in any school around the world. (They are even more of a play on institutionalized, decontextualized, and old ideals in Mexico, where our educational system revolves around the *libros de textos gratuitos* [free textbooks]—a practice established in 1959 by Torres Bodet who wanted to guarantee that all children had access to knowledge and books.) As one would expect, however, these *cuadernillos* are anything but standard practice texts.

For starters, regular textbooks express subject matter in a way that is generalized and impersonal. Knowledge is presented as facts—there is little space for questioning the underlying paradigm, which is of European-North American epistemological influence. They are the epitome of thematization. As far as I am aware, and as mentioned in the book *Levinas, Phenomenology, and His Critics*, Levinas promoted the idea that "thematization as such obscures and distorts all otherness."[255] The Zapatistas, being very mindful not to incur in such acts of totalization, crafted this unique series of *cuadernillos* for the *Escuelita,* writing them in a way that was true to their construction of knowledge—a more ethical approach that celebrates alterity not only among different peoples and paradigms but also among the Zapatistas themselves.

There were four different *cuadernillos* utilized in the course: *Autonomous Government I, Autonomous Government II, Autonomous Resistance,* and *Participation of Women in Autonomous Government.*[256] Each of them highlighted a facet of the central theme; and the central theme, as I noted, was 'freedom'—in particular, the Zapatistas' enactment of freedom according to them. In the *cuadernillos* they did not give definitions, or prescriptive instructions in order for the participants of the *Escuelita* to memorize and adhere to. What the *cuadernillos* held are a variety of different parts that as a whole promote critical thinking about each person's

[255] Claire Katz, *Levinas, Phenomenology and His Critics* (London: Routledge, 2005), 343.
[256] Peter Linebaugh et al., *Midnight Notes Goes to School: Report from the Zapatista Escuelita*, 30.

own conception of freedom. The parts I have identified are (1) personal narratives of historical happenings and political processes at work by the autonomous government, (2) questions and answers, and 3) a space for note-taking. The fact that there is no bibliography offered as a usual part of a workbook is also of great interest—being that the parts omitted are as important as the parts included.

Inside the *cuadernillos* participants find first-person narratives given by members of the Zapatista community. Each personal narrative is preceded by a title given to it which describes the central idea. Underneath the title is the name (only the first name) of the person giving the account and is accompanied by their function within the Zapatistas and the region where they dwell. Their descriptions are contingent on their experience. Nothing is ever proposed as universal. Though they might be talking about concepts and political processes, they are not dogmatic. Rather, by talking directly to and from their own experience, they are sharing their own political constructions, ideals, and ideas *as their own.* Instead of promoting *one* unified conception of freedom (freedom for the Zapatistas) by writing about it (the concept), they have many Zapatistas offer their experience of it as a Zapatista but also as a person—separate and unique.

Each Zapatista's narrative is their own, separate from the rest, and written in colloquial language, keeping slang terms but also errors in grammar and other peculiarities of the way each person uses the Spanish language. Each talks about experiences and concepts pertaining to themselves personally. For example, in the fourth workbook, *Participation of Women in Autonomous Government*, all the narratives and 'question and answer' sections are written exclusively by women (which makes sense, but since we do have many examples of other places where men speak on behalf of women and their bodies, it is important to point out). Likewise,

each person only talks about their experience in their territory and in their time of action. If they were present during the 1994 uprising, they will reference it, but if they joined the resistance, later on, they will only talk about the Zapatistas henceforth.

Most narratives are practically transcriptions of monologues, and each time a monologue is read it becomes reenacted. Some of the monologues also contain transcriptions of the participant recounting or retelling dialogues with others as though they were revisiting a particular happening that exemplified an ideal, a value, or the components of a political structure. These dialogues offer a glimpse into the situation they are drawing from, from their own lived experience, that will help illuminate what they are trying to communicate.

In some instances, the personal stories are followed by the transcription of a small question-and-answer session. Not all of the narratives have this second component. Those that do offer further insight into the particular practices of freedom that had been written about pertaining directly to the title at the beginning of the personal narrative. By utilizing 'question and answer sessions' the creators of the *cuadernillos* shelter these interpersonal interactions that took place between the Zapatista interviewee and Zapatista interviewer. Again, by transcribing real-life interactions, the Zapatistas are able to utilize writing in a way that does not thematize the political life of the Other, but rather, records it playing out—as though one was watching the interaction unfolding as one reads the texts.

The *cuadernillos* were also designed for participants to write their own notes. At the end of each one of the four *cuadernillos* there is a space designated as *espacio para hacer apuntes* [space for notes]. This space varies in each *cuadernillo*, but there are at least two blank pages in each workbook where participants may write down their notes. These pages promote the participation of the 'students' in the creation of the workbook itself. And, since each participant

will jot down their own, very particular notes, then each person will come out of the *Escuelita* with a *cuadernillo* that is uniquely theirs—differentiated from some traditional workbooks that promote only one answer or similar answers.

Absent from the workbook is a component that is mandatory and unimaginably (from academia's standpoint) omitted by choice: the bibliography. The reference list is helpful for us to trace back the ideas to others, others other to the writer of the piece. This practice makes perfect sense and fits in with an epistemology that needs to identify the locus of knowledge outside of the individual who is writing. The omission of references in the *cuadernillos*, on the other hand, implies that each person who contributed to them was not obeying or aligning themselves with an outside *logos*, but rather placing a piece of their interiority in the line of sight of the reader. The Zapatista ideal promoted in the *Escuelita* suggests it is not about communicating the theory of freedom to the Other; but rather, about the experience of responsibly acknowledging the value of alterity.

The Zapatistas clearly take pains to distance themselves from the universalization of ideas and practices. Not only because universal concepts may sometimes be imposed, but because of the totalizing effects of universalization as an action that aims to engulf something into another system. Each of us, in our alterity, responds from our unique otherness. Hence, there is no one idea or practice that can be adequate for one and all at the same time. For example, when the Zapatistas share their conception of autonomy it is not a universal idea, it is a practical on-the-ground experience and they are very clear that it is their experience and cannot be adopted or adapted—nor should it be. They share their experience as a *compartencia* [sharing] so people may reflect on it and take away, from their otherness and in their alterity, what it means or could

mean to them. In their epistemology of otherness, there is no one idea, concept, or practice that holds for humanity as a whole.

It is noteworthy that the *cuadernillos* were written in Spanish since Spanish is not the majority of the Zapatistas' first language. One of the most salient features of the Zapatistas is how diverse they are, especially in their heritage, political practices, and their mother tongues. I have been guilty of not mentioning this before, and of categorizing 'them' within the group of 'indigenous.' As I know, that move has sadly inscribed them into a totalizing scheme. However, in the *Escuelita Zapatista,* this was addressed head-on in everyday experiences. Of these, I will offer many reflections in the pages to come.

I enjoyed doing the analysis of the *cuadernillos de trabajo*, and for a while, thought that I could limit this section of my dissertation to only including my thoughts on them. However, looming over my shoulder the entire time, was the fact that no matter how careful the creators of such writings were, written communication is complicated when approached or understood from a Levinas' perspective. A discourse, a face-to-face encounter between 'the same' and the Other, must be without an intermediary and without communion.[257] Individuals' proximity ("absolute proximity and absolute distance"[258]) is the factor without which genuine discourse does not occur, because there is no revelation, and thus no response and self-critique, which results in totalization. Reading what has been written down in the past (and it is always already in the past once it is being written) leads to an encounter of 'the same'' with its interpretations of what was written. It is not an encounter between two Others; rather an encounter of 'the same' with itself, conflating the Other (given to me by myself[259]).

[257] See Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 90.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid.

It is this reasoning that led me to understand that I also needed to write about other practices of *La Escuelita Zapatista*—practices that were designed to establish a simultaneous presence of alterities. For this task, I chose to analyze the role of the *Votán*, as well as the everyday communal living and working of the participants and the families they joined. I believe these two experiences exemplify the face-to-face in different facets. The work of the *Votán* consisted, among other things, of procuring intimate dialogue between him/her and the participant to whom they were assigned. On the other hand, the experience that took place during the communal living and working of participants with families highlights the revelation of alterity within a group of people (not just among two people) who are joining together for a common objective.

b) *El Votán:*

In Marcos' communique "*Votán II*," el Sub shares that much has been written about the controversy surrounding the meaning of 'votán.'[260] In an interview given in the early years of the Zapatista uprising, el sub alluded to *Votán* as "el dios bueno, el dios del corazón del pueblo y Zapata, la lucha por la tierra."[261] A few years later, el Sub wrote about the term in his collection of stories told by *el viejo Antonio*. Though the term appears in a few of the stories, there is one in particular that identifies *Votán* as one of two primitive gods who existed at the onset of the world.[262] *Votán* and *Ik'al* were two gods in one. When one could be seen, the other was invisible; one was light and the other darkness; they were contrary to each other.[263] The problem was, though they were two, they were immobilized—they could not walk, but they wanted to.

[260] Marcos, "Votán II," 2013.
[261] Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, "Hemos Tendido Un Puente Hacia La Democracia," *El País*, August 9, 1994.
[262] Marcos and Castedo, *Los Relatos Del Viejo Antonio*, 57.
[263] Ibid.

Eventually, through questioning their movement (or lack thereof), they realized that they would be able to move only if one moved first and the other next, but not simultaneously.

By the time Sub Marcos wrote the communique, the word *Votán* had acquired a new definition: it was the definition that the Zapatistas had given it. Thus, *Votán* means 'guardian' in the context of *La Escuelita Zapatista.*[264] And loosely speaking, they were in charge of guarding the participants during their experience in Zapatista territory.

Natalia Arcos, a participant in *La Escuelita,* described her Votán as a *shadow* who was with her "during all the day's activities: as we woke up, ate, bathed, read, cooked collectively, conversed till late… In some instances, some students even shared a room where they slept with their Votán beside them."[265] On the day participants arrived, they were assigned a *Votán*, and he or she never left their side for the entire experience. The *Votán* would, according to Sub, walk alongside the participants, go to the milpa, fetch wood or get water, cook and eat with them, dance and sing with them, even sleep with them and accompany them to the bathroom.[266] As guardians, they were in charge of the adult participants as well as the children (yes, there were participants who were 12 and under). The *Votán* charged with looking after children would aid the parents as caregivers while carrying out their duties as *Votan* to a child participant.

Sub describes the *Votán*'s duties as twofold: to teach and to care for. I have written about the role of *Votán* as guardian, but they also carried out activities as teachers—or tutors.[267] As tutors, they would "help participants understand what freedom is according to (them) the Zapatistas."[268] In order to achieve this goal, they would "tell their history, explain who (they)

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[264] Marcos, "Votán II," 2013.
[265] Natalia Arcos, "POR QUÉ LOS ALUMNOS TUVIMOS UN VOTÁN.," Casa GIAP, September 20, 2013, https://casagiap.org/2013/09/20/por-que-los-alumnos-tuvimos-un-votan/. My emphasis.
[266] Marcos, "Votán II," 2013.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Ibid.

are, where (they) are, and why (they) fight, how (they) fight, and with whom (they) want to fight. They would comment on achievements and mistakes, study the workbooks alongside the participant, (and) solve queries that might arise…"[269] The *Votán*, along with the textbook, would be a stream of facts about the movement. Additionally, the Votán had one very important task: they would speak Spanish to the guests and serve as translators amongst the participants and townspeople (who spoke in their native languages).

In order to achieve such a demanding role, those chosen to be *Votán* worked very hard in the months leading up to *La Escuelita Zapatista.* Some of them were as young as 14 years old—a young age considering the exigency placed on their shoulders. They were not only expected to guard and teach but to be communicators and translators. The most important thing was their political role: they were normal people who were living testimony of Zapatismo.[270] Participants from all over the world were invited to learn about Zapatista autonomy and resistance as constructs of their idea of freedom. They learned about this directly from the Zapatistas—through language, dialogue, and community building. This is very significant as I contend that, in this particular case, it is possible to learn about concepts, like freedom according to the Zapatistas without thematizing—thereby totalizing—the Other (in this case, each individual Zapatista that made up the community). Because participants were invited to partake in the intimate face-to-face exchanges with the *Votán* (and with the families), they were not able to totalize them by reinterpreting the information they had against their own background. Rather, the presence of the *Votán*—the Votan him/herself—detailed and unveiled his interiority, maintaining his alterity all the while. It was through this dialogue that true ethical exchanges toke place.

[269] Ibid.
[270] Ibid.

Ultimately, the *Votán* incarnated a role that is hard for us 'westerners' to grasp because it is rooted in a Zapatista communal conception that is "way-out-there." Natalia Arcos writes an interpretation of the *Votán*-participant relationship, relating it back to the story of *Ik'al* and *Votán* in the collection of stories from *el viejo Antonio.* She explains that her experience with her *Votán* was enriched when she later read this legend.[271] This reading caused her to rethink her perception of the *Votán* as one that can only exist in the duality of Votán and participant. This reinterpretation, she writes, "gave (her) idea of Votán a deeper and more beautiful meaning."[272] Instead of merely thinking of the *Votán* as her shadow, she now perceived herself to be a part of a union: her *Votán* and herself made up a version of a '*nosotro*s' (of an *us*) where the *Votán* is the internal face of Zapatismo and she is the external face looking at Zapatismo from outside.

The explanation Sub Marcos describes the *Votán* as a collective concentrated in one person.[273] "Cada Votán somos todas y todos los zapatistas."[274] [Each *Votán* is all the Zapatistas.] These men and women were handed the task previously held by Sub Marcos and Subcomandante Moises as spokespeople for the entire Zapatista community; in this sense, each participant had as their teacher "nothing more and nothing less than the maximum Zapatista authority," their *Votán*.[275] Together, all the Zapatistas represent the *Votán*, though each is an individual Zapatista who speaks from their own experience in the movement (as with the narratives in the Workbooks).

The intense interaction with the Votán lasted almost the entirety of the participants' stay and fostered incredible relationships between them. At its core, the close experience had two

[271] Arcos, "Por Qué Los Alumnos Tuvimos Un Votán.," 2013.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Marcos, "Votán II," 2103.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid.

people facing each other, with this dynamic taking out any need for an intermediary. These were two Others to each other, face-to-face. Through the intimate face-to-face interaction with the *Votán*, both the participant and their guardian could experience the primacy of ethics as a first philosophy. Among them, little in common, even verbal communication, might have been obstructed because Spanish may not have been their first language. Yet, they were able to experiment together with the possibility (the reality) of entering into a relationship without immediately divesting each other of their alterity. Metaphysics experienced: not thematized. The placement of the *Votán*, in front of the participant, turns him/her into the "interpellated one" and hence "called upon to speak."[276] He/she speaks from a high vantage point, as a teacher, master, and Votán!

c) *La Convivencia*: Communal living and working

The better part of the participants' day was spent "walking alongside the *compas.*"[277] This meant partaking in their everyday activities just as though they were part of the community. Each participant was assigned a Zapatista family they would be with, and on the first day, they were sent away to whichever town or village the family lived in. With the family, they would experience, but most importantly, partake in everyday activities. Whether working or enjoying leisure, eating or sleeping, walking or staying put at their homes, the participants would join in.

The following is a collection of passages from a story titled "My Red Bandana" by Peter Linebaugh,[278] a participant of *La Escuelita Zapatista*. In these passages, he details the communal work done during a day in the life of the Zapatistas, and how it was for him to live through it:

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[276] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity, 69.*
[277] "Entrevista a Raúl Zibechi, La Experiencia de La Escuelita Zapatista," www.youtube.com (ProMedios de Comunicación Comunitaria, August 17, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydkxUIBkhm4&t=190s.
[278] Peter Linebaugh, "My Red Bandana," in *Midnight Goes to School: Report from the Zapatista Escuelita* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2014), 11-19.

> There was only a dim light from a single overhead bulb. My host and his wife had given me their bed, a raised plank of wood under mosquito netting. On this particular evening, they crowded into my section of the hut (...), and with their two boys, ages ten and eleven, we were showing photographs to one another of our families. Rene, Erica, Eduardo, Carlos, David, and I altogether made six in a space scarcely larger than ten feet by four…
>
> In the morning we had walked for an hour to do some coffee bean picking. Up and down small hills and steep gullies along a muddy footpath, we walked before arriving at a lovely glade. Here was a grove of coffee trees beneath the shaded forest canopy. I was determined to pick beans perfectly as if I were a Soviet stakhanovite or as if I were cutting cane on behalf of Fidel Castro… It was Rene who came over to my part of the gully to work nearby. He simply grabbed the trunk of the tree and pulled the higher branches down to him. So much for being tall.
>
> Soon we were seated on the forest floor, Toby happy at a slight distance, and the two men murmuring in Tzotzil. The jug came out with water to mix in our bowls with the compacted cornmeal into something with the consistency of stew and to be eaten with bits torn from one of the tortillas, taken from a plentiful stack Erica had evidently prepared early in the morning for our little expedition... I was exhausted.

What is detailed above is an example of '*la convivencia'* as a learning strategy being experienced by Peter and his hosts. *La convivencia* is a concept not easily translated into English. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the translation of *convivencia* is 'coexistence;' and coexistence is defined as "the fact of living or existing together at the same time or in the same place."[279] However, in the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, the meaning is "*Vivir en la compañía de otro u otros*."[280] [To live in the company of others.] To coexist is different from *convivir.* I'll use the example above. To coexist would only highlight the fact that Peter slept, and ate, and walked, and worked alongside the family, but to *convivir* is to live those experiences as a community—what is highlighted in *convivencia* is the sharing of the photographs, learning how your shorter counterpart can do the job too, being cared for by the person who makes the tortillas early in the day.

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[279] Cambridge University Press, "Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus," Cambridge.org, 2021, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/.

[280] RAE ASALE, "'Diccionario de La Lengua Española' - Edición Del Tricentenario," "Diccionario de la lengua española" - Edición del Tricentenario (Servicio de consulta electrónica al "Diccionario de la lengua española," 2018), https://dle.rae.es/.

Sub Marcos promised, and *La Escuelita Zapatista* delivered, a *clase en comunidad* [lessons from the community]. They offered the participants first-hand knowledge of the community by experiencing their lives and partaking in them by way of *convivencia*. Thus, Sub wrote in *Votán II*: "when attending your first day of class in the community (...), do not expect to find a traditional school model… The classroom is not an enclosed space, with a chalkboard and a professor in front of you, teaching knowledge to students, evaluating and sanctioning them, but rather (you will find) the open space of the community."[281] Most importantly, however, was the fact that participants would be in "*convivencia con la familia que los recibe*."[282] [communal living with the families that will receive you.] It would be in and during *la convivencia* that students would participate in the everyday happenings and gain the understanding of the political knowledge of the Zapatistas.[283]

In my mind, I can see a close relationship between the concept of *la convivencia* and that of Levinas' face-to-face. First of all, I want to highlight the necessity of coinciding physically within the same geography and calendar. To be face-to-face and to be in *convivencia* requires proximity (though there will always also be absent in that presence—that of the interiority). The participants of this event need to be deliberately respectful of those with whom they were with. This was stressed in the communique *Votán II*, by Marcos, emphatically reminding participants that if they came with people they knew, they would have to experience *la escuelita* separately—so the presence of the Zapatistas was not overshadowed by the familiarity of being with those they already knew.

281 Marcos, "Votán II," Enlace Zapatista, 2013.
282 Ibid.
283 Ibid.

What struck me the most about the accounts of participants I have read and the experiment itself, is how it reminds me of Adolfo Lingis' book *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*[284] and Gert Biesta's essay on the book "The community of those who have nothing in common: Education and the language of responsibility"[285] Lingis makes a differentiation between the rational community and the "other community"[286] which is also referenced by Biestas as the community of those who have nothing in common. The community created in *La Escuelita Zapatista*—which exists in this experiment only—resembles the second kind, as the coming together of the Zapatista worldview (as the stranger) was exposed to the observance and participation of people from all over the world. If, as Biesta proposes, there is an interruption of the rational community by "communities that have nothing in common," then what took place at *La Escuelita Zapatista* was certainly an interruption of each person's rational community while also being an irruption of the alterity of the presence of the Other.

In Lingis' book, the author explores ultimate situations, where language is of little use for the interaction among those in proximity to each other. Moreover, *la convivencia*, or the face-to-face, was an experience at the border of language, and hence could work as one more example of those analyzed in Lingis' book. I saved the most important observation for last: *la convivencia* at *la Escuelita Zapatista* was not conducted in a common language. It was not Spanish, much less English. Each family spoke their own language. This meant participants were living with and participating in the everyday activities of people who only spoke Tzotzil, Tojolabal, Tzetzal, Chool, Zoque, among others. This was deliberate, and as Sub explains, "this way (participants)

[284] Alphonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).
[285] Biesta, "The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common: Education and the Language of Responsibility," *2004.*
[286] Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, 15.

will give dimension to what happens when an Indigenous person tries to talk in the dominant language. The fundamental difference is that you will not be disrespected or made fun of for not understanding what is said or for mispronouncing something."[287] If the people in this community do not have language in common, they forgo their epistemic (rational) relationality. They are face-to-face in an experience that is ethical—prior to epistemic common formulations. In this sense, the experiences at *La Escuelita Zapatista* embody the face-to-face as it remains the ultimate situation.[288] The Zapatistas, in their vulnerability, expose themselves as Other as a demand, facing capitalism and holding it accountable for its response to the periphery they represent.

3.8 Final Remarks

At the onset of the chapter, I established it would be radical because it would focus on different epistemological, ontological, ethical, pedagogical, and technical ways of being in the world. I did not use the word 'radical' lightly. This chapter was not only radical in the sense that is given to the word by the Cambridge Dictionary (believing or expressing the belief that there should be great or extreme social or political change). I chose this particular word to allude to its origin in Latin (*radicalis*), which denotes something relative to its roots. One of many conclusions is that *La Escuelita Zapatista* is a radically different proposal of ethical and pedagogical interactions not because it promotes social change, but because it emerges from an essentially (radically) different cultural manifestation—one on the fringes of Modernity.

In my thesis statement, I proposed that there were ways to approach the Other that were not rooted in the prevailing colonial model that totalizes, subjugates, and ultimately makes the

[287] Marcos, "Votán II," 2013.
[288] See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 81.

Other disappear. The Zapatistas and their *Escuelita* were highlighted as an example of how ethical approaches to the Other are enacted in the world today. I chose them out of all other possible examples because of a series of events that lead up to this piece, events that familiarized me with the movement and pedagogical experience. However, I could have looked at a myriad of different alternatives.

Ultimately, experiencing *The Escuelita Zapatista* through the narration of organizers and participants became a window into pedagogics and Latin America *otherwise*. From these narrations, I learned, on the one hand, that we can imagine a world rooted in the acceptance of and respect for alterity. On the other, we have the hope that comes from knowing that somewhere in this big wide world of ours, it is being embodied in the resurgence of traditions that aid and shape ethics. As the Zapatistas declare: *otro mundo es posible.*[289] [Another world is possible.]

[289] *Autonomía Zapatista. Otro Mundo Es Posible.*, DVD (Chiapas (México): Arte, Música y Video, S.A. de C.V., 2008).

Conclusion

To conceive of the other as Other is a recent development in contemporary history. As I have pointed out, following Levinas and authors from the modernity/coloniality working group, modernity/coloniality promoted totalization of the other into the same. More than that, I contend, the other as Other had yet to be conceived of until the initial stages of what Dussel calls Transmodernity.[290] Levinas and Dussel offer us a sound philosophical grounding for discovering the Other. It is only by responding to the other as Other that we accept we are not all part of 'the same.' Alterity or otherness points to the fact that individuals do indeed have different ways of knowing, different ways of being in the world, and different ways of engaging with fellow human beings.

In the past, the Other was not conceived of in any sense that was not intended to reabsorb him into the totality, into 'the same.' This totalization can be understood as the universalization of the human experience. The Spaniards and Portuguese sailed the seas and became powerful. Their culturally constructed categories for understanding, for knowing, for acting, for conducting themselves in society became the norm, and therefore, that which was a particular group's experience of existence was imposed on those conquered. This is what Dussel alludes to as the First Modernity.[291] The Second Modernity was when power shifted within Europe, and therefore the new groups in power imposed categories derived from the ego cogito, from the 'modern

[290] Transmodernity is the historic epoc after modernity/coloniality. Though the word 'postmodern' was innicially used by Dussel and his Latin American contemporaries, it soon became evident to them that the concept developed form a European vision of Modernity. Therefore, Transmodern is the alternative view, from the periphery. The transmodern references the turn toward the cultures of the periphery as they claim their value vis-a-vis the center. For a comprehensive explanation see Enrique Dussel, "Transmodernity and Interculturality: an Interpretation from the Perspective of Philosophy of Liberation," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 3 (2012), https://doi.org/10.5070/t413012881.
[291] Dussel, *1492: El Encubrimiento Del Otro*, 17-18.

subject' and from their conception of 'rationality.'[292] It was thus, that a situated and provincial experience of being in the world became 'universalized' (imposed) through physical, intellectual, and spiritual conquests (all simultaneous) and created what Quijano calls 'coloniality of power.'[293] Coloniality of power thus becomes the mechanism to maintain power under the control of 'the same.'

When the Other erupted onto the scene, there was no place for his presence. This is exemplified by the experience of coloniality and by the four examples of uneticity (the invention, the discovery, the conquest, and the colonization)[294] that represent the treatment of the Other at the onset of the relationship between Europe and America. It was inconceivable to think that the Other had different epistemologies, different technologies, different cosmovisions, different morals, and different manifestations of culture. To make sense of coming up against these realities, philosophers and thinkers of the time (such as Bartolomé de las Casas, Fray Alonso de la Vera Cruz, Fray Pedro de Gante, just to name an essential few) defended the 'Indian-Other' to the best of their abilities; and yet, though they very much observed the different ways in which the 'Indians' inhabited the world, they too justified these differences in light of the intellectual considerations that were available to them (natural law for example[295]), hence engulfing the Other into their own understanding, their own epistemology.

Nowadays, however, new philosophical, political, and ethical insights have led us to discover the other as Other. Levinas' work is, of course, a definitive marker for this turn in our perception and treatment of the Other, yet this ability for us to face and respond to the Other is

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[292] Dussel, "Transmodernity and Interculturality," 39.
[293] Quijano, Quintero, and Palermo, *Aníbal Quijano : Textos de Fundación*, 60.
[294] See in Chapter II, Section 2.2 America as the Other to Europe as 'the same,'
[295] See Virginia Aspe Armella, "El Concepto De Ley Natural Como Instrumento Integrador En El Imaginario Novohispano," *Tópicos, Revista de Filosofía* 34, no. 1 (November 28, 2013): 55. https://doi.org/10.21555/top.v34i1.148.

influenced by many thinkers who have relentlessly tried to understand structures of power and the narratives they have created—among them the philosophers and thinkers of the modernity/coloniality working group. The very conception of 'a narrative' is a good example of interpretative tools that move us away from a totalization of the human experience into the conception of varied, individuated, and alternative existences. In this century and the last, there is no shortage of thinkers who were and are trying to rethink our history in light of the discovery of the other as Other. To move away from a restrictive worldview there has been an influx of work that has highlighted different ways of being in the world, of being Other in the world, such as being a woman, being a person of color, or being working class. Philosophy is rethinking itself in the face of the discovery of the other as Other, it is rethinking its possibilities in a world wherein many worlds fit. And education is also making strides to understand itself and its role in this moment of openness to alterity.

Of these many worlds that we can now clearly respond to as Other, we have the world of the Zapatistas. Vast and steeped in the ancestral knowledge of their people, Zapatismo has emerged as a cohesive movement that promotes the acknowledgment and acceptance of alterity in the middle of neoliberal homogenization.[296] The Zapatistas were at a point where they could no longer sustain their communities with what they were being given inside of the modern/colonial system and said *¡Basta!*[297] [Stop!]. They had had enough of life 'inside' totalizing regimes[298] and burst out. Once they did, they did not only expect to be 'seen' as Other,

[296] *Interview with Marcos (From the Battle of Mexico City)*, *YouTube* (Rage Against the Machine, n.d.), Subcomandante Marcos, "First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," 1993.
[297] Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, "PRIMERA DECLARACIÓN DE LA SELVA LACANDONA," Enlace Zapatista, January 1, 1994, https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1994/01/01/primera-declaracion-de-la-selva-lacandona/.
[298] For 500 years the peoples of the Lacandon Jungle had been subjugated by different regimes, among them, Spain during the Viceroyalty, by the insurgents of the War of Independence, North American imperialism, French empire, the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, and the 70 year monopoly of the PRI party. See Marcos, "PRIMERA DECLARACIÓN DE LA SELVA LACANDONA," 1994,

but created an almost three-decades-long campaign to find ways to achieve and maintain autonomy, sovereignty, and self-determination.

There are many lessons the Zapatistas, and in particular *La Escuelita Zapatista*, can teach students and scholars the world over. This revolutionary movement, made up by different autochthonous communities, demonstrated true resilience in spite of the bleak conditions and impoverished circumstances in which it found itself. However, in order to speak of these lessons their interlocutors must understand they are (we are) face-to-face with a population that knows itself to be radical, 'out-there,' other. The interlocutors' modern and contemporary 'rational' Western frameworks are different from the frameworks used by the Zapatistas. Our interpretations and communication will always fall short of truly understanding Zapatistas' ways, because in Levinas' terms, they 'overflow'[299] the modern/colonial system. They bring with them more than this system contains.

It is necessary to accept how the Zapatistas want us to learn from them; any attempt to poach, adapt or adopt their ways constitutes a transgression and is severely frowned upon by them. Yes, they actually have thought about the fact that they are 'in the height' and have established the proper 'treatment' of their experience so as not to promote its totalization by the central dominating force that is antagonistic to its genesis. Zapatistas know themselves to be rooted in their cosmovision and philosophy, constructs of their historical ancestry, subjects of politics contingent on their geography and calendar. They also know that Others, all the others that make up the 'world wherein all worlds fit,' are individually and communally rooted in their own cosmovision and philosophy, constructs of their own historical ancestry, and subjects of politics contingent on their own geography and calendar. The Zapatistas have a singular way of

[299] Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 297.

doing politics, of approaching learning, of construing reality. Hence to 'learn' from the Zapatistas, their interlocutors must engage critically with them and "take what they think will be useful to them and leave aside what isn't useful or bothersome."[300]

Gustavo Esteva, who was a dear friend, ally and advisor to the Zapatistas, astutely predicted that after the *Escuelita* the people who attended or who heard about it, would misconstrue the educational, political, and ethical intentions of the experience. In a 2013 newspaper article titled "Y si, aprendimos," Esteva warned us against the perils of totalization in the following paragraph:

> Habrá seguramente la tentación de traducir lo aprendido organizando cursos, convirtiendo la experiencia en un paquete de conocimientos y habilidades para transferir a otros. Quien lo intentara descubriría pronto que así traicionaría el sentido, estilo e intención de la escuelita zapatista. No nos invitaron para educarnos en una doctrina y mucho menos para tirarnos línea. Nos compartieron una experiencia vivida, cuya sustancia común sólo puede existir en la diversidad. El desafío no consiste en reducir todo eso a discurso formal, más o menos técnico, sino en reproducir a la manera de cada quien esta forma de contagio. Pero esto exige tiempo, para elaborar la experiencia y preparar terreno fértil en que prospere la flor de la autonomía.[301]
>
> [There will surely be the temptation to translate what has been learned by organizing courses, turning the experience into a package of knowledge and abilities that can be transferred onto others. He who will try that will soon discover that betrays the meaning, style, and intention of *La Escuelita Zapatista*. We were not invited to be educated in a doctrine, much less to be lectured. They shared with us a lived experience, with a common substance which could only exist in diversity. The challenge is not to reduce all of that to a, more or less technical, formal discourse, but for each to reproduce this contagion in their own way. But this requires time, to elaborate on the experience and prepare fertile ground upon which the flower of autonomy will prosper.]

At this point my predicament is clear. How can I possibly conclude by summarizing what I learnt from *La Escuelita* so the academic community can learn from it. In other words, how can

[300] Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos and Subcomandante Insurgente Moises, "SECOND GRADE OF THE ZAPATISTA LITTLE SCHOOL," Enlace Zapatista, July 17, 2015, https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2015/07/28/second-grade-of-the-zapatista-little-school/.
[301] Gustavo Esteva, "Y Sí, Aprendimos," *La Jornada*, August 19, 2013, https://www.jornada.com.mx/2013/08/19/opinion/018a2pol.

I establish a relationship between myself, my reader, *La Escuelita Zapatista*, Zapatismo, Dussel, and the modernity/coloniality working group, without immediately divesting myself and them of my/their alterity? It is a perplexing predicament for sure. And yet, the question posed is anticipated by Gustavo Esteva's warning, Esteva functions as the prophet who foresees my conundrum before it takes place. The way out of this predicament will circle back to the experience taught by the Zapatistas, in the height and from their relation to Levinas' Ethics of Alterity and Dussel's Pedagogics of Liberation.

Responding to the other as Other

Throughout this piece, I have ventured to present examples of ethical theories and educational movements that directly or indirectly promote "*un mundo donde quepan todos los mundos"* [a world wherein all worlds fit]. I offered an explanation of Levinas' ethical theory of the Other in order to use it as the framework, the bones, of the argument in subsequent chapters. I then reviewed some of the work done by the modernity/coloniality working group in order to demonstrate both ethicity and unethicity in human interactions: ethicity in the work of Dussel's liberation philosophy and unethicity in the treatment of Latin America as the periphery to the modern center. Finally, in the third chapter, I examined *La Escuelita Zapatista* as a pedagogical example of a lived ethical experiment. Even though the analysis of *La Escuelita* was at first the focus of the chapter, in retrospect, I believe the focus became the treatment I, as a writer, was trying to give the Zapatista movement—by placing them in the height.

The focus of my study was 'the problem of the Other' and the different ways we have approached this 'problem.' In these three chapters, I tried to demonstrate that there are a wide array of ethical ways philosophers, educators, and activists (revolutionaries?) have tried to answer this 'problem.' To be ethical, thus, is to be respectful of alterity—of absolute otherness.

In line with this ideal, Levinas offered his metaphysics or ethics as a first philosophy in the form of a most detailed theoretical proposition. Dussel, inspired by Levinas, works within this ethical framework in order to propose a liberation—a liberation to be achieved by philosophical praxis. The Zapatistas enact ethical stances in their everyday lives and in their educational events. We can see this in their ways of writing, educating, and holding events.

At this point, I could simply tell the readers what they can learn from the Zapatistas and their *Escuelita*. I could fall in line with Western academic practice and tell the reader what they can take away from this dissertation and my analysis of the *Escuelita* in relation to Dussel's pedagogics and Levinas' ethics. Yet, if I do that, I will be overpowering their thoughts through the imposition of my own. I will be guilty of a charge akin to the one Heidegger brought up against traditional metaphysics. If metaphysics "inquires about the being of beings, but in such a way that the question of being as such is disregarded, and being itself is obliterated,"[302] then I would be inquiring about the otherness of others, but in such a way that the question of otherness as such is disregarded, and otherness itself is obliterated.

Rather than give in to the exigencies of the system I am heavily critiquing, I will heed the call of the Zapatistas. After this exhaustive exercise of placing Levinas, Dussel, and the *Escuelita Zapatista* at a height, I will take what I think will be useful for me and leave aside what isn't useful or is bothersome.[303] And, acknowledging the readers' alterity I will offer those thoughts as a sharing, as a *compartencia*; so in turn, the reader may "take what (they) think will be useful for them and leave aside what isn't useful or bothersome."[304]

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[302] W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz, *The Presocratics in the Thought of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Peter Lang, 2017), 222. For an in-depth explanation of Heidegger's claims see Martin Heidegger, "Overcoming Metaphysics," in *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 84-110.
[303] Marcos and Moises, "SECOND GRADE OF THE ZAPATISTA LITTLE SCHOOL," 2015.
[304] Ibid.

This dissertation comes full circle as I write that the most useful (and inspiring) thing I take from the Zapatistas and their *Escuelita* is their way to respond to the Other as other. The Zapatistas have been relentless in their pursuit of autonomy, sovereigty and self-determination. They have been equaly as persistent in matching their philosophical, political, and ethical ideals to their actions. Though the Zapatistas have in no way reached a utopic state of ethical perfection, they have worked observably hard to achieve *congruencia* [congruence]. Congruence is a virtue that has given the Zapatista movement direction, consistency in their philosophy and morality, and a frame with which to critique and assess the ethicality of their actions.

The Zapatistas are promoters of radical and alternative pedagogies. These pedagogies, whether enacted in the *Encuentro Intergaláctico,*[305] *la Escuelita Zapatista*, the Indigenous schools for each *Caracol,*[306] or any other Zapatista educational experience, are mindful of

[305] In 1996 the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) organized the *Encuentro Intercontinental por la Humanidad y contra el Neoliberalismo* [Intercontinental Meeting for the Humanity and against Neoliberalism] most commonly referred to as the *Encuentro Intergaláctico* [Intergalactic Meeting]. Faithful to their very unique forms and ways of doing things, the Zapatistas created the *Comisión Suprema, Aleatoria, Intergaláctica e Hipernacional de Invitaciones Serias y de las Otras* [Supreme, Aleatory, Intergalactic and Hypernacional Commission of Serious and Other Invitations] whose members created 5 different models of invitations depending on the purpose of each invitee. All invitations have instructions on how to respond and how to "give away" the invitation (like make a hat for a child with it). This event took place from July 20th to 28,th 1996 in three *caracoles* in the Lacandon Jungle in Chiapas and gathered between 3,000 to 6,000 people from all over the world to share ideas and experiences against globalization and the threat it represents to the world. Some well-known intellectuals attend the encounter including Yvon Lebot, Eduardo Galeano and Alaine Touraine. The Mexican authorities prevented some foreigners from attending the event by threatening them with deportation. During the event Sub Marcos said that "as far as we know, the majority of the attendees are from planet Earth: mostly from the US, France and Spain." Eleven years later, in 2007, the EZLN through the *Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena-Comandancia General Del Ejército Zapatista De Liberación Nacional. Comisión Sexta Y Comisión Intergaláctica Del EZLN* (Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee – EZLN General Command. Sixth Commission and Intergalactic Commission of the EZLN) launched the invitation for the *II Encuentro de los Pueblos Zapatistas con los Pueblos del Mundo*. This was a follow up event and took place from July 20th to 28,th 2007 at the *caracoles* Oventik, Morelia and La Realidad in the highlands of Chiapas state of Mexico. Much smaller than the previous one, this event was focused mainly on the threats minorities were facing all-over the world and included people from 70 different countries. See Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, "INVITACIÓN AL ENCUENTRO INTERCONTINENTAL POR LA HUMANIDAD Y CONTRA EL NEOLIBERALISMO," Enlace Zapatista, May, 1996, https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1996/06/09/invitacion-al-encuentro-intercontinental-por-la-humanidad-y-contra-el-neoliberalismo/.

[306] In contrast to *La Escuelita Zapatista* which was an isolated educational event, the Zapatistas have a more traditional schooling system for the young. Each *Caracol* or autonomous territory has their own. To read about them see Bruno Baronet, *Autonomía y educación indígena: Las Escuelas Zapatistas De La Selva Lacondona De Chiapas, México* (Quito: Abya-Yala, 2012).

alterity and the responsibility that comes with recognizing the Other as other. If the hallmark of these pedagogies is to treat the Other as other, then they must avoid the totalization of the new arrival (be it manifested in the young, of the foreign, or the stranger) at all costs. This means that they first and foremost identify the infinite in the young, the foreign, or the stranger and respond to that which they bring, that which already overflows the educational system. Rather than absorb these new Others into the system, they account for them as separate and welcome what is radically different in them.

There are many examples of how this pedagogical acceptance of alterity becomes enacted in educational spaces and places. In particular, in the *Escuelita* we could see its presence in the way the Zapatistas lay out and carry out the pedagogical components of the experience: with true care for the Other who will be taught, and who will, at the same time, teach. To this end, each participant was assigned a *Votán*. Each *Votán* cared for, looked after, guided, aided, and taught with the conviction of the Other as other. They also incarnated this role with the belief that they represented the collective and were, at the same time, separate from it.

Each *Votán* was considered to be an individuated manifestation of the collective. Their individuality and separateness from the collective were as important as their belonging to it. Each *Votán* prepared meticulously for this task for months. They knew that they represented the Zapatista collective as the revolutionary, grassroots, anti-neoliberal movement it has always been. Yet, each *Votán* is also a person who has their own experience of the collective and the movement, and hence speaks to the 'student' from his or her particular involvement and lived experience.

The openness of the 'little school' attests to the Zapatista's pedagogy as well. By keeping the experience of the *Escuelita* outside the confines of the traditional school building,[307] during all hours of the day, and learning from all interactions with all the people there, not just one teacher, the *Escuelita* was experienced as an event. Education as an event, learning as an event, alludes clearly to the face-to-face as an event. The openness of the interactions promoted genuine intersubjective exchanges, not limiting them to the desired outcomes as traced by educators in traditional educational settings. These face-to-face exchanges between the 'students' and the Zapatista people demanded that all participants acknowledge alterity and respond directly to the interpelled one. In this sense, each participant brought forth a bit of the infinite inside of them and unveiled it to the Other.

Final remarks

The Other is absolutely other, and pedagogy as ethicity (such as that from the Zapatista *Escuelita)* should treat the Other as other. I hope to have fought tooth and nail, to defend this point, to bring this argument to the forefront of my piece. In order to treat the Other as other we must abandon traditional philosophy and systems of totalization (yes, I am thinking of schooling, schooling enacted today is a totalizing institution—it is the monopoly of education).

To treat the Other as other is a monumental task. One not everyone is up for. To leave the confines of our intellectual safety zone, to listen to things we do not agree with, to wrestle with what seem to us as rational discrepancies, requires openness to and acceptance of alterity. This would be an ethical response to the Other, a response given prior to engaging with him through

[307] A parallel can be found with the pedagogical work of Rabindranath Tagore. Though half a world away and half a century before, Tagore and the Zapatistas share the interest of moving 'school' outside of the confines of the physical buildings, which is usually essential to the educational endovour in its most traditional sense. See David T. Hansen and Ana Cecilia Galindo Diego, "A Cosmopolitan Spirit, or Life as Education: Octavio Paz and Rabindranath Tagore," *Pensamiento Educativo: Revista De Investigación Educacional Latinoamericana* 51, no. 1 (2014): pp. 6-21, https://doi.org/10.7764/pel.51.1.2014.2.

intelligibility, meaning, sense, signification and language. To treat the Other as other was the task I set out to accomplish in my work. I wrote about it (as it was the content of my work) and I wrote with it in mind (as it was the methodology). It was almost an impossible task given the fact that my dissertation is a written piece of philosophy. It was *almost* impossible… yet I believe this dissertation is, indeed, already written, and written respectfully to my reader (in the most non-totalizing way I could offer) and in respectful response to my interlocutors Levinas, Dussel, the modernity/coloniality working group, the Zapatistas, Rafael… no, no, Marcos… no, no: Galeano; Galeano?

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