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# On Usul al'Ikhtilaf & Usul al'Dhiyafa

(otherwise known as an Ethics of Disagreements & an Ethics of Hospitality)

Mohamed Jean Veneuse

19 June 2013

“Far apart, though never ceasing to burden each other, will we have to bear our strife-ridden souls?” Paul Claudel from *The Break of Noon* (1906)

This is how the entry unfolds, is foretold, in this tale of endless crises in this ongoing War. And yes, there's a war going on in our streets, our hearts, our souls, not just in Egypt, or the predominantly Arab and Muslim societies we live in, but rather the world all over across every age, color, gender, ability, sex, class, and creed. But before all else and if we are going to go a necessary distance here, if we're going to start talking politics then we must talk ethics, and what they entail (given that ethics differ from morals<sup>1</sup>). We

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<sup>1</sup> 'Thou shall not kill' is a moral but if someone walks into a room with an AK47 and threatens our family, our children, even strangers amongst us we're obligated to self-defend them and ourselves. Ethics are practical, situational, and depend on time and space, indeed on interactions that dynamically change from

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Retrieved on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2021 from  
[mohamedjeanvenouse.blogspot.com](http://mohamedjeanvenouse.blogspot.com)

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need to know what we are talking about when we use words and terms because both are tools for domination as well as act as means for liberation. We need to be specific, we need to read and exercise a degree of intellectual rigor, if not be open to experiences outside our own and what we know as Muslims, as Socialists, as Arabs, as indigenous peoples of similar yet differing interfaith belongings...

In a radically diverse world a cardinal lesson learnt is to acknowledge that one cannot homogenize, indeed that one cannot essentialize and totalize peoples and ideas, regardless of how large or how small in number and 'importance' these people are, especially when we're speaking of participants in social movements. One cannot speak of Islam let alone Marxism or Anarchism, given their infinite series of milieus, in the singular any more, if it were ever possible to begin with. For each of these categories that we use as labels are dead, alive only in so far as they are diverse in terms of their political and ethical understandings, and thus the order of their commitments and the subsequent interpretations that arise as a consequence. And though each of these labels matter what matters more is the multitude of ethics and politics that should have arrived with taking on and embodying each of these categories and names. Each one of us is not one just thing. We are composites of many (some)things from our birth to death. We are not made of a series of disjunctive *or*'s but rather conjunctive *and*'s. And if we are keen to learn from social movements past, indeed are keen in changing these worlds, contained within a so called planet Earth, we would observe that the struggle to genuinely address issues of race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, age, and nationality actually did more, rather than less, to facilitate broader participation in resistance, than a struggle that simply addressed class, capitalism and neo-liberalism. And so to you Socialists in particular, and across what-

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street corner to street corner, from our interaction with one individual to another. We are different people in different situations – akin to being schizophrenic when interacting with our families, to strangers, to friends.

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ever spectrum and stripe: We cannot simply center the homogeneous and abstract subject worker – therefore excluding how the entity ‘worker’ dynamically intersects, alters, shifts and changes – when gender, sexuality, age etc intersect with this specific constructed category, causing the subsequent disequilibrium and mobility of it given its subjugation to fluxes of power relations that dynamically transform its movements, becomings, and force relations at the politically myopic and personal level, let alone at the macro level when we’re talking about integrated world-wide capitalism. It has historically been a proven mistake to cater movements to the idea of the lowest common denominator when ‘mainstream’ politics are solely concerned with privileging one exploited group without examining the intersections and constant movement(s) between that group and other oppressed characteristics and minority belongings; I’m a socially constructed able-bodied male with patriarchal and matriarchal socializations, as much as I am of privileged middle-class and racialized belongings, as well as a desire hetero-normalized, all that become relevant and contribute to the construction and tailoring of my positionality, indeed the language and way I act and speak, as a singularity bred from a multiplicity of belongings. Again, as beings becoming we are not just one thing and forever, whether we acknowledge it or not, we are becoming! A worker is not just a worker but also rather many other components, traces, and characteristics of ethico-political relevance besides becoming a worker too! We must understand that the tentacles of corporate control and the collusion of government and corporations have roots in processes of colonization and enslavement that in establishing class distinctions, also gendered, racialized and sexualized and so on and so forth these distinctions. Therefore addressing other systems of oppression besides just class, and the people these systems affect, isn’t about elevating one group’s suffering over that of a working class. Rather it’s about understanding how mechanisms of discipline, control and power actually operate. When we understand that, we can craft projects of liberation that can truly

engage with a radical imagination that includes everybody, if not most – given there are those who will forever believe in the dominant order (to be understood as the capitalist nation-State and what it stands for in heteropatriarchal and homo-nationalist values and what have you)...

We are not one thing! We are indeed what we know, what we don't know and will never know, what we encountered and accepted and rejected, indeed what we never imagined existed yet that is alive and part of the experiences of other peoples all over. But then how can we know, teach and learn from each other without tearing each other apart in an Earth already fraught with endless conflicts? Indeed an Earth where some of us have supposedly killed God, while others maintain God's presence only to then speak on God's behalf, making all of us demagogues? After all, killing God doesn't eliminate this divine Creator's space and power rather it merely makes fascistic tendencies more accessible to everyone.

There is a crisis of dialogue, of gossip, of knowing how to disagree and of knowing how to offer hospitality to each other. There is a war going on and social movement activists are a central part of this war, in dire need of cultivating ethical and political spaces to engage in addressing and dealing with political and ethical disagreements, particularly considering that these disagreements ultimately reflect on what strategies and tactics we choose for liberation and resistance. Indeed, there has to be a way out for us to negotiate and talk about our affinities, similarities and differences. We must create spaces in which we can share different practices of *conflict resolution*, or an ethics of disagreements, otherwise known as *Usul al'Ikhtilaf* in Islam, to complement an ethics of hospitality, otherwise referred to as *Usul al'Dhiyafa*, towards each other. We must learn to love, talk of love and death and their roles and meanings to us. Indeed, we must learn compassion towards each other, walking hand in hand together, while asking each other what each one of us knows, if we as indigenous peoples from worlds all over,

Should this document be of use, what is of benefit within it is from the Creator and those who I was blessed to learn from, encounter and meet, even strangers, foreigners, and what passersby. What shortcomings exist within it, are my own and I take full responsibility for...

Saludos, Salam, Adieu, and all phrases and words that signify meanings of grace & peace...

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non-Gandhian militants, as the anarchist and Marxist influenced *shaheed*/martyr Bhagat Singh born to a Sikh Punjabi family and hanged at the age of 23 in India's move towards independence. It's to dismiss the incidents of Dharasana Satyagraha, a protest in which Indians under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu and Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, were protesting British salt tax in May 1930. A protest in which protestors were expected to 'not use any violence under any circumstances' and accept that they'll be beaten, that 'they must not resist', not even raising 'a hand to ward off blows', leaving by certain estimates 320 injured many 'insensible with fractured skulls, others writhing in agony from kicks in the testicles and stomach' with scores of the injured receiving no 'treatment for hours' and two dead (Miller, 1936: 193–199). Purportedly this was a 'nonviolent' position in which Indians marched to meet batons in British hands knowing quite likely they could die in 'violent' protest. To maintain a binary position regarding violence and nonviolence is to be ambivalent of what the affective use violence became for the Civil Rights Movement by radicals as the BPP or the Black Panther Party, and NOI or Nation of Islam. These people with arms too contributed to the restoration of a measure of dignity and respect to a people's history whose dignity and respect was and remains stolen. The city of Chicago, Illinois, with its annual African-Americans dead as a consequence of poverty stricken-gang related violence ought sufficiently testify, if the disappearance of indigenous peoples of the Americas isn't enough for our eyes, not to the death but rather the lie that is the 'American dream' and the illusion of 'non-violent' resistance. There are histories of struggles, individual and collective, 'minor' and 'major', that antecede or precede and exceed the 'Arab Spring-Islamist Winter' so let's learn and engage them as opposed to simply focusing on an arrogant us. More is to be claimed regarding (non)violence, love and death soon enough, so if you're still reading, if you're listening, stay tuned...I'm hardly done; I'm merely warming up.....

and as Arabs, Muslims, and Socialists (across the broad spectrum of anarchism and Marxist-Leninism) are to see through liberation. Particularly given what we share of common enemies in struggle and especially if the ultimate goal is to no longer leave the masses we supposedly 'represent' and are a part of behind. Any person left behind is unacceptable if our intent is to truly seek genuine liberation for all. There can be no doubt our fates are intertwined. But that demands that we must understand that we have internalized within ourselves the Manichean and Machiavellian logics of divide and conquer, present within, and that formulate a part of an ongoing colonialism and imperialism, active through our own egos. We have not decolonized or engaged adequately the decolonization of our traditions or ourselves, and decolonization within itself has a beginning but never an end. We must understand that the dominant order, to be understood as capitalist nation-States, will always seek to sow seeds of hate between us and make enemies of us. We must dare speak of *Usul al'Ikhtilaf* and *Usul al'Dhiyafa* if we are to attain any hope in delineating if not 'conquering' micro-fascisms we have internalized such as authoritarianism and capitalist-individualism. After all, we have all been born and raised in societies where the patriarchal nation-State (that acts as an oedipal Father teaching us how to discipline and control ourselves and to act as little command centers, Mussolinis, coaches and cops proliferating everywhere) and Capitalism (our oedipal Mother that teaches us to commoditize and materialize anything and everything from friendship to love, let alone encourages the embracing of egomaniacal selfishness that functions and thrives on interest through finance and speculative capital rather than profit) are the conditional norm. The nation-State and capitalism are European colonial and imperialist constructs we've inherited, indeed that we've internalized and that we must thus confront within ourselves and in our relations with anything and everything else, (non)human. Especially given the mental, physical, emotional ways that capitalism and nation-States have traumatized, abused

and transformed us as beings. There is a war going on, inside us and outside of us in relation to all that surrounds us. Vigilance against fascism can never be relaxed and bearing in mind that fascism and totalitarianism are not one and the same thing, the former being connected “not just [with] the desire of the few to give orders, but also the desire of the many to take orders, or better, the desire of all to live in a system run by orders”, be it the nation-State or worker tribunals (Portevi, 2001: 194–196). The battlefield is everywhere. What ‘worlds on this earth are we leaving our children’ is a question we should all be concerned with; our children who in truth arrive from infinity and become the piercing arrows we shoot towards immortality. Our only hope is that we become beings that are willing to learn, teach each other, and our children to raise generations anew, but that can only happen if we, ourselves and together, have the courage to confront and delineate fascist tendencies in order to give birth to new communities of resistance that are ethically and politically grounded in *Usul al’Ikhtilaf* and *Usul al’Dhiyafa*.

Ikhtilaf is an Arabic term that means taking a “different position or course from that of another person either in opinion, utterance, or action” (Al-awani, 1993: 11). It is from “the related word khilaf”, from the same root, sometimes used synonymously with Ikhtilaf, and that means “difference, disagreement, or even conflict broader in meaning and implication than the concept of direct opposition” (Al-awani, 1993: 11). This is “because two opposites are necessarily different from each other whereas two things, ideas, or persons that differ are not necessarily opposed to or in conflict with each other” (Al-awani, 1993: 11). Ikhtilaf is necessary, because what is the acknowledgment of a friendship and a relationship between two people but the adventure of a painful, and yet joyful, life (Deleuze, 1997: 19). People, even the closest of lovers and friends, will inevitably disagree out of respect for their relationship and the friendship’s nourishment and growth. The prerogative is that “if differences are confined to their proper limits and people are trained to observe

permitted the all too frequent impractical claim ‘that nonviolence works and the principle examples are Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King in the U.S.’ because this observation constitutes ‘a great historical whitewashing’ (Gelderloos, 2011). Such claims are disrespectful to martyrs in the first 18 days of Tahrir, in Maspero, Mohammad Mahmoud & every event since. Fact is the resistance in India was incredibly diverse, and Gandhi was a very important figure within that resistance, but the resistance was by no means pacifist in its entirety, and there were a number of armed guerrilla groups, a number of militant struggles, very important riots and other strong clashes which were a part of the struggle for Indian independence. So on the one hand Gandhi basically got negotiating power from the fact that there were other elements in the struggle which were more threatening to British dominance. The British specifically chose to dialogue with Gandhi because for them he was the least threatening of the important elements of resistance and had those elements not existed they simply could’ve ignored Gandhi. We need to therefore be open to a biodiversity of strategies and tactics given the epistemic and structural violence that we experience everyday. Is poverty, is sexism, is ageism, is disability, not violence leveled upon our bodies everyday?! Above all matters fetishizing nonviolence is a whitewashing of Malcolm X’s words when Malcolm says: “it’s a crime for anyone being brutalized to continue to accept that brutality without doing something to defend himself” and the “future belongs to those who prepare for it today” (1964). It’s to ignore George Jackson’s words that “the concept of nonviolence...[is] a false ideal...when it presupposes the existence of compassion and a sense of justice on the part of one’s adversary. When this adversary has everything to lose and nothing to gain by exercising justice and compassion, his reaction can only be negative” (1994). Jackson, as Malcolm, of course, never laid witness this but I remain doubtful they would’ve concluded much different, both assassinated, as of course Gandhi and King. To adopt a dogmatic stance on nonviolence is to neglect the involvement of

‘Please ask your guests (and do not be angry with me)’. They said, ‘He has told the truth; he brought the meal to us’. He said, ‘As you have been waiting for me, by Allah, I will not eat of it tonight’. They said, ‘By Allah, we will not eat of it till you eat of it’. He said, ‘I have never seen a night like this night in evil. What is wrong with you? Why don’t you accept your meals of hospitality from us?’ (He said to me), ‘Bring your meal’. I brought it to him, and he put his hand in it, saying, ‘In the name of Allah. The first (state of fury) was because of Satan’. So Abu Bakr ate and so did his guests” (Bukhari & Muslim, Chapter 8: Prophet Hadeeth 162).

Unconditional hospitality is at the heart of Islam. Derrida writes, “Islam deduced the principle...‘right of hospitality’, *ikram al dayf*, respect of the human person...sent by God” (2002: 370). “Entre donc” without reserve, cost, calculation or rationalization (2002: 370). *Jiwar* is a noun of action in Arabic; “of neighborliness to the other who is now beside oneself; and *Dakhil* is the interior, the intimate, for the stranger, the passer by, the traveler to ‘come in” (Derrida, 2002: 373). The *Dhief*, the visitor, “the guest, is *Dhief Allah*, a visitor from God (Derrida, 2002: 373). For the *Dhief*, the guest, Massignon writes: “we [Muslims] offer ourselves as a pledge ...voluntary prisoners... in a kind of captivity or spiritual residency...Hostages, we offer ourselves as hostages...we substitute ourselves for the other” (Derrida, 2002: 376 – 377). One can witness hospitality in Islam through “the notion of *da’wa* from the root *da’a* (to call, invite)...In the Qur’an, Chapter 30, Verse 24...[and] whose plural form] *da’awat*, from the root *da’a*, to call, to invite, has the primary meaning call or invitation...the sense of invitation to a meal and, as a result, of a meal with guests...The *da’wat al-mazlum*, prayer of the oppressed, always reaches God. The *da’wa* of the Muslim on behalf of his brother [, sister, stranger and foreigner] is always granted. The word is applied to a vow of any kind” (Derrida, 2002: 406)...

In concluding let me say this, given the circumstances in the Middle East and the world: I find me ill of non-violent propagators who are

the proper ethics and norms of expressing and managing differences...several positive advantages could result” (Al-Awani, 1993: 14). Dissention is good, but not for the sake of just dissenting as Taha Jabir Al’awani writes. In *The Ethics of Disagreements in Islam* (1993), Al’awani classifies the spectrum of disagreements, generally, into four types:~

Briefly, the first are disagreements concerned with narrow visions of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and a dogmatic refusal to broaden one’s own perspective due to the practice of essentialist politics. This type of disagreement arises from an ‘*I am right and you are wrong*’ attitude and that’s tied to the arrogant logic of: ‘I and only I am in possession of *the* truth instead of a more perspective or *a* truth’. In this instance, one or both people are engaging in disagreements without being “able to argue and produce supporting textual”, indeed lived evidence and grounded experience, with respect to their ethical and political orientations and conjured opinions (Al-awani, 1993: 12).

The second cause for disagreement appears because one or both people have given a particular ethical and political problem in a moment more “importance to the exclusion of any other aspect or issue” such that the issue and problematic then becomes “the basis for judging, disdain, or accepting” each other (Al-awani, 1993: 5). The consequence of this is that the cause of disagreement is subsequently “inflated and blown up out of all proportion” (Al-awani, 1993: 5) causing strife between us.

The third cause of disagreements is due to “the stubborn adherence” of one or both people to their own opinion or position and their attempt to defend their position is simply to prevail upon someone else (Al-awani, 1993: 12). In other words, the disagreement emerges not because of a particular issue necessarily but rather because one or both people are trying to demonstrate an expression of superiority over the other. The purpose of an individual choosing to disagree in this case, is to force another person to accept their opinion or to hold that opinion against them

– with all these “elements in disputation or [Hegelian] dialectics (*jadal*)” leading the discussion to be carried out “in a contentious manner in order to gain the upper hand” over someone else (Al-awani, 1993: 12). In this case, argumentations involve an individual’s dereliction in commitment to warding off their ego, or what Deleuze and Guattari call *micro-fascisms* and that exist in each and everyone of us because of the privileges that we enjoy in relation to each other be they along the lines of class, race, age, gender, sexuality and ability etc (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980: 279). It’s a circumstance where the self is seeking praise or is being ambitious, neglecting the exercise of humility towards oneself and in relation to someone else (Spinoza, 1949: 173). The whole point of a disagreement becomes the forcing of someone else to accept a particular position contrary to his and/or hers.

The fourth reason for a disagreement is a situation where one or both people disagreeing are both motivated by the pursuit of knowledge and truth in their disagreements. In other words, selfishness and egoism may not be the reason behind disagreeing. In this case, “disagreement...should not hinder the call to remove the underlying causes of such disagreement” despite the fact that the disagreement is being led by each person’s confusion of what’s ethical and political with one’s “own personal inclination” (Al-awani, 1993: 16–17). Indeed, the cause of disagreement, in this instance, is that knowledge is being confused with conjecture and the preferable is being confused with what is (un)acceptable. But a true relationship ought be capable of transcending “differences of opinion or compromise on questions that are open to varying interpretations” (Al-awani, 1993: 54–55). A true relationship requires that each individual disagreeing be capable of practicing caution regarding their narrowness of vision, as well as feelings of exclusivity, bad faith, malice, and gossip. A true relationship requires that both individuals, and ostensibly communities, be humble. A true relationship involves that both people be capable of delineating their impulsiveness and obstinacy, and indeed to realize that public welfare

He replied: It is for a day and a night. Hospitality extends for three days, and what is beyond that is a Sadaqa for him [and/or her]; and he [and/or she] who believes in Allah and the Hereafter should say something good or keep quiet” (Bukhari & Muslim: Book 18: Prophet Hadeeth 4286).

It is *as if*, as Derrida describes, “the stranger could save the master and liberate the power of his host; it’s *as if* the master, *qua* master, were prisoner of his place and his power, of his ipseity, of his subjectivity (his subjectivity is hostage). So it is indeed the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage – and who really always has been. And the guest, the invited hostage, becomes the one who invites the one who invites, the master of the host. The guest becomes the host’s guest” (2000: 124–125). To invite is to un-conditionally offer without valorizing what one offers self-righteously. To invite is to spread one’s garment as a cushion in honor of the guest.

It is narrated by “Abdur-Rahman bin Abu Bakr that his father Abu Bakr invited a group of people and told me, ‘Look after your guests.’ Abu Bakr added, ‘I am going to visit the Prophet and you should finish serving them before I return’. Abdur- Rahman said, ‘So I went at once and served them with what was available at that time in the house and requested them to eat’. They said, ‘Where is the owner of the house (i.e., Abu Bakr)?’ ‘Abdur-Rahman said, ‘Take your meal.’ They said, ‘We will not eat till the owner of the house comes’. Abdur- Rahman said, ‘Accept your meal from us, for if my father comes and finds you not having taken your meal yet, we will be blamed severely by him, but they refused to take their meals. So I was sure that my father would be angry with me. When he came, I went away (to hide myself) from him. He asked, ‘What have you done (about the guests)?’

They informed him the whole story. Abu Bakr called, ‘O ‘Abdur Rahman!’ I kept quiet. He then called again. ‘O Abdur-Rahman!’ I kept quiet and he called again, ‘O ignorant (boy)! I beseech you by Allah, if you hear my voice, then come out!’ I came out and said,



and that indeed the chatterbox's mouth never dries (Foucault, 2005: 342). Both parties would also have to find a comfortable and safe environment for them to speak so as "to allow for maximum listening without any interference or fidgeting...[After all,] the soul must take in the speech addressed to it without turmoil...calm...[turned] towards the speaker...to the obligation of a fixed attention" (Foucault, 2005: 343). The company of two (and more, given our composition as multiplicities) ought not rush or be rushed *tabla rasa*. Because despite unconditional hospitality's appreciation of the wait it is also no longer able to wait, but rather is already working to invite, to extend, to present and send an invitation not only to a home but also a life without anxiousness and worry that the invitation is not accepted. Both parties must have faith that the relationship will work out and thus from the beginning have good intents, acknowledging to their own selves and each other why they've chosen to gather and get together; all the possibilities and impossibilities that entails. On the one hand where "hospitality must wait, extend itself toward the other, extend to the other the gifts, the site, the shelter and the cover; it must be ready [, not to wait, but] to welcome...to host and shelter, to give shelter and cover; it must prepare itself and adorn itself...for the coming of the other; it must even develop itself into a culture of hospitality, multiply the signs of anticipation, construct and institute what one calls structures of welcoming... a welcoming apparatus (Derrida, 2002: 361). That's to say "not only is there a culture of hospitality but there is no culture that is not also a culture of hospitality" (Derrida, 2002: 361). To invite is to honor the other, the guest, according to their right as a guest. Therefore there needs to be a cultivation of cultures of hospitality regardless of faith, race, across sex and gender, ability etc. For as "Abd Shuraib al-Adawi reported: My ears listened and my eye saw when Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) spoke and said: He [and/or She] who believes In Allah and the hereafter should show respect to the guest even with utmost kindness and courtesy. They said: Messenger of Allah, what is this utmost kindness and courtesy?

(in Arabic, *maslaha*) ought supersede individual whims. Indeed, it is to realize that *ijma*, consensus, and *musharakah*, sharing, are more important than selfishness. After all, "(Ikhtilaf) and selfish, egoistic motivations (*hawa*) have a tendency to develop and grow larger and larger" to the point that they penetrate deep into a person's psyche and take hold of their "mind, attitudes, and feelings" to the extent that the person loses sight of the overall, 'holistic view of things', until they become completely dogmatic and blind. We cannot ignore the "common, lofty goals and objectives" (Al-awani, 1993: 6) our relationships as individuals, communities, and societies call for at this juncture in our histories as a species no more. An example of the practice of an Islamic ethics of disagreements and a culture of acceptance towards 'the other' as narrated in the Sunnah, the Islamic Oral Tradition, is as follows: ~

"It is related that Wasil ibn Ata [, and who is regarded as the founder of the Mu'tazilah tradition of thought and who died in Basrah in 131 AH,] was with a group of Muslims and they came upon some people whom they recognized as Khawarij. Wasil's company was in a critical situation and faced possible annihilation at the hands of the Khawarij, who were of the opinion that Muslims who did not share their views should be killed. Wasil told his group that he would deal with the situation. The Khawarij came up to him and asked him threateningly: 'who are you and your companions?' Wasil replied: 'They are mushrikun ('infidels' – those who associate others in worship with God) seeking protection so that they may listen to the word of God and know His laws'. 'We grant you protection', said the Khawarij and Wasil asked them to teach him. This they proceed to do according to their own positions. At the end, Wasil said: 'I and those who are with me accept [what you have taught us]'. Thereupon the Khawarij said, 'Go in company with one another for you are our brothers in faith'. 'That is not for you to say,' replied Wasil as he recited the following verse of the Qur'an: 'And if any of the *mushrikun* (those who ascribe divinity to any but God) seeks your protection, grant him protection,

so that he might hear the word of God, and thereafter convey him to a place where he can feel secure' (Chapter 9: Chapter of 'The Repentance', Verse 6)" (Al-awani, 1993: 5).

To conclude this central point on the necessity for an ethics of disagreements, it is critical to point out that I see it important that people who are in disagreement ask themselves and each other the following question: 'Was there a proper moment I missed to push the disagreement and negotiation of difference(s) between us forward, little by little, till the moment we could see eye to eye on our disagreement?' The point of departure of a disagreement, 'the truth behind a disagreement' isn't in the haughtiness and threats that arrive with it, it's in the process of self-reflection involved after it occurs as 'an event' located in space and time – especially if it's a matter of *friendship*. Disagreements are rooted, to an extent, in potentially discoverable centers. To reach them involves, on the part of the parties disagreeing, knowing how to set the parameters of the disagreement, how to make it pivot, each towards the other, framing it gently and with compassionate finesse to a point from which there's room to waggle, to re-negotiate the relationship. Then negotiations of the disagreement(s) can last so long they can mean the beginning of war and/or the beginning of peace depending on the type of disagreement(s), willingness to negotiate, and timeliness of negotiations. After all, sometimes friendships and relationships need to temporarily end or be put aside, the particular reason being the fact that 'negotiations are exhausting'. I say this while also realizing that the danger of leaving disagreements and relationships behind is that though nobody has the right to partake in the negotiation of a disagreement without either party's consent, the fact of the matter is a disagreement between two people can spread and poison other relationships and the societal fabrics they share, given we are social beings connected as infinite branches, rhizomes and roots, that carry ripple effects upon others along the way. This happens in such a way that other disagreements, with time, encircle the actual reason(s) for a disagreement with the passing of distance

indeed the vocabulary used, alive, in the other's tongue. Class, ability, sexual, racial and gender privileges exist, in the very words we use and the way we choose words and express ourselves in mannerism, character and tone; so let us learn each other's brushstrokes. Moreover, only one party or individual is truly capable of talking at a time, while the other as Foucault describes ought surround themselves "with an aura and crown of silence...not convert[ing] immediately what it heard back into speech...rather keeping hold of it, in the strict sense, that is to say, preserves it and refraining from immediately converting it into words" (2005: 342). Here it's only appropriate to assume that the party or individual listening is giving the benefit of the doubt to the party or individual speaking. In other words, that the party speaking is speaking truth 'whatever the consequences' and that it does so as it tries to keep close to its most intimate thoughts, before thoughts were framed and then translated into speech. For though, yes, one can misspeak or "is granted some right to lie, for the best reasons in the world, one must also realize that when one does, one threaten[s] the social bond itself, the universal possibility of a social contract or a sociality in general" of friendship (Derrida, 2000: 67). It would be better off for the party that wants to lie to stay silent or say: 'I can't divulge, I won't talk about that yet, maybe never'. After all, as Derrida teaches, 'when I am speaking to you, I promise you the truth' and "just as any speech act promises the truth (even and especially if I am lying) – well, anyway, I can always lie...but that will signify quite simply that therefore I'm not speaking to someone else [because I am already lying first and foremost to myself], end of story. And in doing this, I am not recognizing either the essence of speech as giving one's word, or the necessity of founding a social bond...without hesitating: 'Yes, one should never lie, even to assassins'" (2000: 67). From this we can derive that it is the duty and responsibility of the one talking during a conversation to realize too when they ought stop talking. In other words, the one talking must realize that "the chatterbox is always an empty vessel"

assemblages of enunciation,' or 'regimes of signs'" (Deleuze in Bogue, 2004: 71). And so repressive forces don't stop us nowadays from expressing ourselves but rather force us to express ourselves all the time. But what a relief to have nothing to say, the right to say nothing, because only then is there a chance of framing the rare, and even rarer, thing that might be worth saying. What "we're plagued by these days isn't any blocking of communication, but pointless statements" (Deleuze, 1995:129). In this sense, social movement actors shouldn't "quibble straightaway" (Foucault, 2005: 342) but rather think, collect, and 'self-examine them-selves' understanding their positionality, identity, indeed subjectivity, in relation to themselves and each other. To do so has to be reflected in our mannerisms of speaking and regardless of the different forms language (emotional, physical, spiritual and mental) takes. Social movement actors are actors whose thought ought to be the guiding principle behind their speech. Indeed, they're actors whose intent is always "on experiencing, not interpreting but experimenting, since what they experience, and what they experiment with, is always actuality, what's coming into being, what's taking shape" in their encounter with each other (Deleuze, 1995:129). We as activists would benefit ourselves if we are to comprehend the stakes involved in relating or not to what we've seen, experienced, heard, whether we've come to learn something new than what we knew or presumed to be true when encountering something or someone else in our daily wanderings and travels, even in our journeys within ourselves. After all, if friendship is in part a matter of perception it requires a point from which to relate to or perceive 'the Other'.

As for speech, it's only right that whomever starts to talk would demand that the other not only intently hear but *listen* to 'the Other', because hearing is a form of listening while under threat. Hearing unlike listening involves dismissing what's *said* by way of calculating in advance and preparing a response to what's said, instead of bearing witness to the tonality, the form, the grammar,

and time, therefore leaving the original reason for disagreeing as a source of bold separation for both parties, making it say the exact contrary of its program and what it demands in terms of always being open to addressing the disagreement in the nearest future. And therefore though sometimes relationships need distance, at least for a time period, such that those disagreeing 'agree to disagree', both parties disagreeing must always be open to coming back and talking about their differences. Therefore sometimes relationships need 'a break', and for the people involved to take time off from each other to self-reflect and think about what happened, as at times it is most reasonable for both parties to 'give up and move on, or at the very least try to stay out of each other's way', especially if both parties are after the same strategic objectives in so far as resistance is concerned but are disagreeing over tactics. In this instance, there is indeed benefit in allowing time and individual growth to alter and heal the rifts, opinions and perspectives of the parties involved; that is, how the individuals involved in a disagreement might perceive and receive each other in the future. An example of this 'taking a break from each other' can be witnessed in the case of the Indigenous Muslims of Chiapas – who split from the Mura-bitun World Movement founded by a Scottish convert Abdalqadir as-Sufi – and some of whom are ex-Zapatistas, and who were, for instance, in the process of negotiating their differences with non-Muslim Zapatistas, given that some Muslims identify ethically and politically as Zapatistas, because they are unable to resist the attraction of Zapatismo as a mode of political and social organizing. Ethical and political differences between Muslim and non-Muslim Zapatistas led to rifts in the past and that are still being negotiated. In this example, Mujahid, a member of the Muslim Zapatista community, talked to me about how, despite their disagreement, there continues to be an exchange of delegates between them as Muslim Zapatistas and non-Muslim Zapatistas to this day. Mujahid says:~

“We would chat, see what there is, we would share what we are as Muslims, if they aren’t, we would give them the knowledge we have, if they could use it, they use it, if it doesn’t serve them, they don’t. They then can be aware of the point of view that we have...For example the brother here, the companero, Haviv, was a Zapatista...He was there with them, he was fighting with them, but there are things that we see in the inside. It is different to look at it from the outside, then living inside there. What you see from the outside is different than what it is inside...me, it hurts my heart, sincerely, I tell you that it hurts my heart to see my indigenous brothers and sisters in these circumstances. Not just in San Cristobel, but in the jungle. I was there with them in the jungle, I saw, see how they are suffering, they don’t have anything. They predominantly don’t have hospitals, they don’t have schools, they don’t have work, or food, but why? There is so much ignorance and which leads to differences. There is a lot of ignorance in the indigenous communities. There is a long way until one understands where everything comes from”<sup>2</sup> (Jean Veneuse, 2010).

For Mujahid and the Muslim community their priority is the support of indigenous peoples, regardless of whether they are Zapatista or not. Like Mujahid says:

“Principally it’s the base. Me personally I’ve chatted with the Zapatistas... but principally it is the base...[It’s about] going out and talking with people here [not in

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<sup>2</sup> The interview and excerpt was conducted as part and under the auspices of Richard JF Day’s *Affinity Project*. The Affinity Project’s website and home: [affinityproject.org/index.html](http://affinityproject.org/index.html)

person asked the Messenger of Allah (may peace and blessings be upon him) who amongst the Muslims was better. Upon this (the Holy Prophet) remarked: From whose hand and tongue the Muslims and non-Muslims are safe” (Bukhari & Muslim: Book 1, Prophetic Hadeeth: 64). Instead of feeling obligated, or compelled to talk, social movement activists would benefit themselves by keeping language scarce, even drying it up, delivering themselves and others from speech, cultivating a culture of silence, as they become silent observers of each other. That’s not to say mixing mother tongues and getting to know one another isn’t of vital importance, but rather only to say that silence can free the subaltern (i.e. the other in me), indeed provide enough comfort for a voice to later strut petulantly and speak without obligations and freely. As Benedict Spinoza writes “I should say that human affairs would be much more happily conducted if it were equally in the power of men to be silent than to speak; but experience shows over and over again that there is nothing which men have less power over than the tongue” (1949: 132). To command one’s own tongue, to have it dictate on one’s own terms and in one’s language and voice, what one says, in the way one desires to be, is to preserve the measure of benefit in silence and truth during a conversation. Indeed, it is to feel bereft by what’s said, like waiting for an aria in a concerto, or a voice that deafens speech, such that the life around two can be heard and such that even a whimpering whisper overwhelms and screams.

Social movement activists need to therefore understand that language within itself is charged with power relations. The object of language isn’t to communicate per se because like Deleuze describes language is “the inculcation of ‘mots d’ordre-‘slogans,’ ‘watchwords,’ but also literally ‘words of order,’ the dominant, orthodox ways of classifying, organizing, and explaining the world. Far from being a mere collection of ideological signifiers, language is a mode of action, the various mots d’ordre of a culture being enforced through regular patterns of practice, ‘collective

past. A smile is an inaudible language consisting of fallen letters, a symbol, a sequence, in between two faces, for how else ought one arrive, when to smile is to disarm with an upturned arc. To smile is to say: “come in [Entrez donc]... even if the smile is interior and discreet, and even if it is mixed with tears which cry of joy” (Derrida, 2002: 359). How can there not be tears of joy when two waited, were destined, to meet, given the “question of hospitality is also a question of waiting, of the time of waiting and of waiting beyond time” (Derrida, 2002: 359) resembling thus a “labor...a pregnancy...a promise as much as like a threat” in its anxiety, in its joy, as before an announcement at childbirth (Derrida, 2002: 359)? This labor, this pregnancy, shouldn’t necessarily start with interrogative questions like ‘*What’s your name*’ because the name of the ‘other’, a foreigner, any newcomer, should be against any deadline imposed because it ought offer itself under its own terms that are surrendered (Derrida, 2000: 29). In friendship, the two are better off resembling two stray dogs begging, panting, before each other’s names. Moreover, even if one were to ask for a name, the asking is to be tenderly, humbly, as if to say: “what should I call you, I who am calling on you, I who want to call you...[by] your name” (Derrida, 2000: 29). The two ought befriend patience, become comfortable in silence, because silence as Michel Foucault reminds us is “one of those things that has unfortunately been dropped from our culture. We don’t have a culture of silence...[but rather] the obligation of speaking” (Foucault, 1988: 4). Silence can’t be interpreted therefore as necessarily oppressive, because it carries with it liberatory potentials as well. For though the thought of two individuals embellishing in speech when they are getting to know one another might be useful, even seem necessary, this tete – a – tete can be carried by both people getting to know one another to the extreme of each person worshipping the sound of their own voice, such that talking no longer becomes something to be given or taken but rather something nauseating. It is narrated that “Abdullah b. Amr b. al-As is reported to have said: Verily a

the jungle], and sharing what we know, giving them [what they need because] the real struggle is on the road...for the kids, the women, there are a lot of people and there is a lot of suffering, [which] I’m not sure you know but it is very sad. People walk for about 6 or 7 hours with their kids, with their sick families. We have to give the message, what is the struggle they are carrying, what is their struggle? Is it the best/correct struggle? Should they be going out in front of their family for a struggle? We see people struggling, and then they are left abandoned? That is the sad part of teaching about what is the struggle”<sup>3</sup> (Jean Veneuse, 2010).

In light of this, it’s astonishing, then, that although “from 19<sup>th</sup> century socialism to the New Left to today, practices of” solidarity and friendship “have been morphing under the pressures generated by a complex field of political struggles” (Abdou, Day and Haberle, 2009: 214), the topic of an ethics of disagreement has yet to be adequately addressed or emphasized enough in Socialist circles and politics. Furthermore it’s critical to comprehend that teaching the logic of ‘agreeing to disagree’, is different from Al-Awani’s ‘types of disagreements’ as a means to ‘finding a way to agree’, and is a necessary lesson to comprehend and learn as well.

In the end, when it comes to negotiating our differences as beings that are in fact trying to become human, I appreciate the idea of *mediators*, which I encountered with Gilles Deleuze. I value this concept and practice despite what the Holy Koran says: “If you fear that a breach (*shiqaq*) might occur between a couple, appoint an arbiter from among his people and an arbiter from among her people”; for though the verse’s context is marriage, it can be related to

<sup>3</sup> The interview and excerpt was conducted as part and under the auspices of Richard JF Day’s *Affinity Project*. The Affinity Project’s website and home: [affinityproject.org/index.html](http://affinityproject.org/index.html)

any two experiencing *shiqaq* (Chapter 4: Chapter of ‘The Womyn’, Verse 35). Moreover it ought be noted that the concept mediator is radically different than the idea of an *arbitrator* (which I take as meaning an imposer of a settlement upon parties undergoing disagreements and/or contestations) and even different from the term *negotiator* (which I take as meaning a representative of one party with respect to another). Rather a mediator assists contesting parties to reach some kind of agreement, without the impositional powers of an arbitrator. These differences are crucial to me, and are not to be glossed over when attempting to reconcile between two or more movements, two or more opinions, and even two or more people and whose relation is compatible with two or more parties in line with the mediator’s identities (Deleuze, 1997: 126). For example with the identity Muslim anarchist, Muslim anarchists have access to more than just two communities, knowledge systems and worlds, which at least include Islam(s) and anarchism(s), considering the infinite forms, shapes, these identities come in. A mediator’s function, say in the example of Islamic anarchism, is to negotiate between the two or more parties, Muslim and anarchist. Indeed, to at least do so with those willing to listen, to open a ‘third space’ between both worlds and as such a mediator is an individual who is chosen because they are honest, trusted by, is tied to, and cares for both parties, indeed because they belong to both networks and communities. The mediator’s function is to facilitate a discussion of whatever there is dispute over and between the two or more disputing parties upon request. A mediator is someone who can “negotiate ways and means, the speed of change”, indeed who is knowledgeable in theory and in experience and practice, given mediators would be expected to have access to different mother tongues, discourses, communities, and different regimes of truth and beliefs. A mediator can act as a “series with several terms, or complicated branching series” with the power of clarifying misconceptions between Muslims and anarchists (Deleuze, 1997: 126). A mediator is someone capable of producing new truths, breaking

encounter, and acts as a reminder to both people of what can be lost if a compromise can’t be found when they have a disagreement. Especially, if wills of individuals and parties fail to remember the positive affect they’ve shared and spread together as political allies from the moment they first met. I will briefly map the broad contours of what I believe Usul al’Dhiyafa may involve.

In Tupinamba ceremonies it’s customary, for example, for women to evoke laughter, tears or a smile as a sign of welcome, of hospitality, towards the visitor as a compassionate and loving sign of welcoming ‘the Other’. These are the traces of friendship that ought be present, fully present, amongst Tupinamba women who “when they receive visitors who go to visit them begin to cry as a sign of welcome... with both hands over their eyes... weeping their welcome to the visitor” (Derrida, 2002: 358). And it is through these types of practices of friendship that an ethics of hospitality can be constituted, and needs to be further cultivated. That is, by knowing and learning different ways of welcoming each other in different traditions or cultures and putting such gestures into practice given that when two people meet it truly is a universal and divine blessing that they have met when before they were nameless to each other. That we greet each other with a smile or open the door to laughter, even tears, is of prescriptive importance, for how can we dissociate a culture of hospitality “from a culture of laughter or a culture of smile...during which one welcomes ... without smiling at the other, without giving a sign of joy or pleasure, without smiling at the other as at the welcoming of a promise” (Derrida, 2002: 358)? To smile is to breach proximities, to draw in open space a gesture signifying a welcome on this canvas that is “the neighbor’s face, who is of kin and the neighbor who is not of kin, and the fellow traveler and the wayfarer...Lo! [for] Allah loves not such as are proud and boastful” (Chapter 4, The Chapter of ‘Womyn’: Verse 36 & Saheeh Muslim, Prophetic Hadeeth: 25). A smile is a glad tiding, a *sadaqah* in Islam, an offering of generosity, towards the one who marches

1994; Feinberg, 1998; Agamben, 1993). This paradoxical stance of unconditional hospitality that is still conditional, undeniably and undoubtedly, is difficult due to the process of precisely figuring out how 'similar' these commitments need to be, which commitments have to be similar, whether A, who says they believe in X and Y, truly believes and practices X and Y in a way that B will accept as such. For example, if A and B, however, do not find themselves to be 'similar' enough in enough of the ways each of them requires, then after this initial meeting and un-packing of the kit bags, as it were, they may well decide to go their own ways. To construct a relationship that relates to a politics to friendship is to have demanded an ethics of hospitality to arrive with the relationship, an ethics from which political allies have welcomed one another when orienting as friends politically and ethically to each other; friendship is beyond superficial stances of solidarity that way. An ethics of hospitality has to permit enough room to discover whether or not the commitments of two people coincide, and to what extent and degree these commitments are similar. This is the tension in the discourses and the practices being addressed. One would further hope that the willingness and sharing of practices or mechanisms of hospitality and negotiation of differences is not merely confined to the participating parties in this text, that is Muslims, Socialists and anarchists, for these ethics certainly do not originate with them, but rather they are ethics undoubtedly present and can be traced in western and non-western feminisms, faith based religions, social movement and indigenous traditions, and that are capable of ushering in different mode of relating, a different degree of intimacy, autonomy, and thus can assume a different mix entirely. Usul al'Dhiyafa is therefore an ethics from which different people are able to draw on, when the need rises during the (re)negotiation of political differences between them, and which is something bound to happen. An ethics of hospitality allows the two disagreeing the ability to engage in and draw on practices of intimacy they expressed and shared between them since their first

the stereotype of what it is to be a Muslim or an anarchist for both parties, thus influencing both traditions and the people involved with these traditions. As Deleuze writes: "what this means is a new way of talking...not so much for disagreement to be a matter of winning arguments as of being open to things...setting our 'facts,' not of a situation but of a problem. That is, making visible things that would otherwise be hidden" (1997: 127). That becomes the role of mediators. The objective of autonomy-oriented peoples ought to be to have people, 'intellectuals', and bodies of activists, who are recognized as trusted mediators between communities unless proven otherwise: mediators who would return and value the times of Oral Tradition, pedagogy and engagement. Mediators would be expected in good faith of providing and assembling new knowledge productions that break stereotypes (Deleuze, 1997: 127). Mediators are expected to exist conscious of their own power relations and in "parallel to supplementary channels" as self-education by each individual Muslim and anarchist about each other (Deleuze, 1997: 127). Mediators would be responsible in keeping relationships and dialogue fluid between communities of autonomous peoples, and to act as channels, negotiating in times of peace and times of war. It's not about just building lines of "vague friendly contacts", where Muslims and anarchists exchange "vague information about" one another in 'solidarity' protests as during the Iraq anti-War protests (Deleuze, 1997: 127).

Differences "of opinion" cannot become "reasons for estrangement and schism" because the unity of hearts and our collective objectives as radicals have "to be far more important... than selfish considerations...which are the source of calamity" and which afflicts all of our hearts and souls today (Al-awani, 1993: 7). Our calamities are born out of our tendency towards seeking isolationism and the constriction of ourselves to narrow opinions merely as an expression of our fears (instilled by the mistrust capitalist nation-States and geopolitics create); indeed our fears of being betrayed and which we can't let divide us (Al-awani, 1993: 7). We

need to remember as social movement actors that “differences of opinion or compromise on questions that were open to varying interpretations” are possible and need to be exhausted, not that they can ever be exhausted (Al-awani, 1993: 54–55). Enough then with the petty drama! *Again, all social movement activists need to exercise caution with regards to narrowness of visions, feelings of exclusivity, bad faith, malice, and gossip.* I repeat the former statement because it seems important. Above all there shouldn’t “be quick talk of independence, even if” it is unavoidable, because the independence of Muslims and anarchists from each other, as an example, ought “be made to depend on very hard bargaining” (Deleuze, 1997: 126). The tireless effort of consulting one another, of negotiating, of listening (as opposed to just hearing one another) is part of the process where each party humbles itself till hopefully consensus is reached. Like the Holy Koran says: “And do not dispute with one another lest you fail and your strength desert you” (Chapter 8: Chapter of ‘The Booty’, Verse 46). Anarchists, Muslims, and autonomy oriented people and activists need to arm themselves, and the generations to come with clear exposure to different practices of knowledge and an ethics to behaving when a disagreement arrives. In other words, we need to arm ourselves with what’s referred to in Arabic as an *adab* or etiquette of character. Everyone needs to remember that every one of us that comprises this life “Will die [one day], and truly they [others too] will die [one day]” (The Holy Koran, Chapter 39: Chapter of ‘The Throngs’, Verse 30). From an Islamic perspective: Should a disagreement happen, for instance, between, say, two ethically and politically committed people, other individuals and communities with the same commitments have the responsibility of mediating between them. The Holy Koran sheds more light when the Creator says: “If two parties among the Believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace between them: but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other then fight ye (all) against the one that transgresses until it complies with the commanded values of Allah; but if it complies then make peace

Guerrero and the State of Mexico”<sup>6</sup>. Finally, it’s to be noted that the intention of CORECO as a space is not as Columbian philosopher Estanislao Zuleta argues, “the eradication of conflict and its dissolution among people living together [which] is neither attainable nor desirable, not in one’s personal life—love and friendship—nor in the community”, but rather the construction of “a social and legal space in which conflicts can manifest themselves and develop, without the opposition to the other leading to the suppression of the other, destroying it, reducing it to impotence or silencing it”<sup>7</sup> (1991; 2008)...

It is important to realize that Usul al’Ikhtilaf need to be complemented hand in hand with what is referred to as an ethics of hospitality, or Usul al’Dhiyafa. Usul al’Dhiyafa and Usul al’Ikhtilaf are foundations that ought accompany a politics of friendships<sup>8</sup>. This friendship, one would hope, is one that would be predicated on a paradoxical stance of unconditional hospitality conditional on the sharing of similar ethical and political commitments to someone else. This represents a similar call to what Richard JF Day says when he writes – in line with other scholars – on the “need to guide our relations with other communities according to the interlocking ethical and political commitments of groundless solidarity and infinite responsibility” towards constructing new types of communities (2005: 18, 186–202; Braidotti, 2002; Haraway, 1991; Elam,

<sup>6</sup> Further information on CORECO can be found at the following website: [coreco.org.mx/wordpress/?page\\_id=333](http://coreco.org.mx/wordpress/?page_id=333)

<sup>7</sup> The quote cited is a translation by Steven J. Stewart Rosene Zaros and retrieved from: [absinthetheblogspot.com/2008\\_02\\_01\\_archive.html](http://absinthetheblogspot.com/2008_02_01_archive.html)

<sup>8</sup> I take this term from Leela Gandhi and who following Jacques Derrida, Jean Luc Nancy, and Maurice Blanchot, writes on what is referred to as *politics of friendship* in her text – *Affective Communities: Anti-Colonial Thought, Fin-De-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (2006). A politics of friendship is precisely what the term implies. That is, the building of friendships based on the existence of similar ethical and political commitments and therefore not necessarily based upon identity politics concerned with belonging to the same family, political spectrum, community or nation.



condense compromises between their members, and that function by striating space and instilling the fear that all one is left with if the nation-State disappears is a national community composed of different groups who would destroy one another, due to conflicting interests, in an endless struggle (Lipietz, 1987: 19). In this sense, CORECO's "operative team consists of 7 people specialized in positive transformation of conflicts and popular education". Their purpose is threefold: 1) Relating to "and communicating with civil and social organizations at local, national and international levels in order to strengthen civil alternatives which favor peace and the prevention of conflicts, a life with dignity for indigenous people and democracy". They pursue this through their participation in the organization of encounters, forums, consultations and network meetings; 2) Intervention in "conflicts between different groups, organizations and/or communities through mediation or advising local mediators or negotiators"; 3) And finally, "training in the methodology of positive transformation of conflicts through the preparation of local commissions of reconciliation and peace as well as preparing civil, social and religious organizations in the same methodology"<sup>5</sup>.

Since CORECO's founding, members like Toussaint "have attended at least 60 cases of conflict resulting from political, land-related or religious problems, as well as train local commissions of peace and reconciliation in five different regions (including 11 counties) of Chiapas". CORECO also had a hand in founding "the 'Network for Peace' ('La Red por la Paz') in Chiapas which consists of 12 participating civil organizations. This network, has organized the 'Forum for Autonomy', in August of 2003, which for the first time united indigenous people who have been involved in different autonomous processes in the States of Chiapas, Oaxaca,

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<sup>5</sup> Further information on CORECO can be found at the following website: [coreco.org.mx/wordpress/?page\\_id=333](http://coreco.org.mx/wordpress/?page_id=333)

between them with justice and be fair: for Allah loves those who are fair (and just). The Believers are but a single Brotherhood Sisterhood: So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers [and sisters]; and fear Allah, that ye may receive Mercy" (Chapter 49: Chapter of 'The Private apartments', Verses: 9–10). There's thus humility to be sought in remembering death, the finiteness of life, and so before rushing to a disagreement, revolutionary and committed activists need to ask themselves: is 'the disagreement truly worth the trauma we're about to inflict on each other'?... There are other traditions with an ethics of disagreements. For instance, amongst Indigenous communities in Chiapas, and though not referred to as an ethics of disagreement, this process is referred to as *positive conflict resolution*. I had the humbling opportunity to spend time, live with, and interview, during the course of my time in Chiapas, a priest and Zapatista community member by the name of Felipe Toussaint about what he referred to as positive conflict resolution. Felipe Toussaint was a former Vicar General of the diocese of San Cristobal, under Bishop Ruiz, and played a key role in orchestrating the San Andres Peace accords between the Zapatistas and the Mexican government in the aftermath of the Zapatista uprising in 1994. In describing his current work in conflict resolution, Toussaint said: "in some places, being an active Catholic implies entering into opposition [and mediating] with neighbors and even one's own family" when ethical and political differences arise (Jean Veneuse, 2010). Toussaint's current work, having left the Church and having taken a stance against institutionalized religion, is with an organization, Commission of Assistance towards Community Unity and Reconciliation (Comisión de apoyo a la unidad y Reconciliación Comunitaria), otherwise known as CORECO. CORECO is a non-governmental organization emergent from civil society, and the organization began in 1996, without any party or religious affiliation, working in the resolution of community conflicts and impelling the peace process in Chiapas. CORECO, in Toussaint's words, focuses on helping:

“different spiritualities and traditions to work together...it is not a hierarchical group...it’s a base group. What I’m doing know is working between indigenous communities to support the people to resolve the political and economical conflicts in a pacifist path, doing mediation work between different groups, to have a good dialogue, negotiation, giving advisory to people in an area, to watch and be a witness to a different process”<sup>4</sup> (Jean Veneuse, 2010).

CORECO’s practice of positive conflict resolution involves the “training of people in positive conflict resolution...through a school of conflict resolution”; that is, a school of thought that’s outside the paradigm of the nation-State. Organizations like these are vitally important and act as alternatives given that nation-States have shown, more often than not, their capacity to inflame, rather than calm, disagreements. An example of this is as Diane Nelson points with the Guatemalan Maya and the way nation-State policy is. Nation-States more often than not are bent on rigidifying, rationalizing and reforming, homogenizing and hegemonizing identities, transforming itself to become the only privileged site to be occupied for a peoples’ rights to be afforded (1999:123), thereby leaving little room for what’s experimental, creative, and pre-figurative to it, by minorities. Of course, this is precisely the reason why “the Mayan rights movement critiques the imagined uniform nation” in favor of multiple forms of political organizing, “like *traje*, which is unique to each village” (1999: 80). Nation-States, then, demand a certain war of maneuver, or war of positions, by identity groups (be they indigenous groups, women, the poor, or students and who want change on behalf of a larger or more diverse constituency and bearing in mind the

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<sup>4</sup> The interview and excerpt was conducted as part and under the auspices of Richard JF Day’s *Affinity Project*. The Affinity Project’s website and home: [affinityproject.org/index.html](http://affinityproject.org/index.html)

limitations of essentialist identity politics) in their demand for sets of rights, grievances, and recognition. After all, nation-States limit possibilities for achieving demands by minorities by transforming their demands to struggles that are endlessly fought for through a “politics of recognition” (Coulthard, 2008; Taylor, 1992; Fanon, 1967), and even pitting minorities oppressed against each other. Minorities need to resort to each other as opposed to submitting to the paternalism of the nation-State whose role, in reality, is to play the function of an untrusted intermediary of everything in life (Har, 1994). Nation-States result in little more than the breeding of subjects regulated and divided as children amongst each other by institutions and structures by virtue that the subjects are “subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures” (Butler, 2009: 2). The consequence of all this is that all of us then fall into the trap of belonging to a banner of a false and imagined nationalism and its minimalist vision – the State. If we recall the first 18 days of Tahrir were utopian because peoples organized together, yet we were unified only under the false colonial banner of Egyptian nationalism that became the only identification that truly held us together given we hardly discussed a political and ethical vision of what was yet to come following the uprising, let alone engaged in decolonized understandings of what it means to be a nation (in relation to each other, neighboring others, if not the world), having internalized its limited colonially imposed vision. Nationalism served as a weak trunk of a tree that held the diverse branches together – when it should’ve been our ethics and political commitments that served as the tree’s trunk so as to bind us, as branches, together. That is why we are in the condition we are in now. Again and again, killing and removing a God and a Pharaoh, does not destroy God’s space and power but rather makes of us all demagogues vying for that displaced God’s space and power and that remains intact! Nation-States are institutional and hierarchical forms of civic organizing that