

THE CONSTRUCTION OF ZAPATISTA AUTONOMY

"When the struggle began in '94 we were fighting for eleven points. There weren't the thirteen yet (land, housing, work, food, health, education, culture, information, independence, democracy, liberty, justice and peace).

The thirteen were after the San Andrés Accords. We didn't know how we were going to achieve them, but we are seeing it now. We imagined that a lot of food or doctors and hospitals were going to come, but we didn't imagine that we, and our own children, were going to be the doctors, the architects, engineers, teachers, that we were going to be teaching ourselves. We didn't imagine that we were going to create an autonomous municipality and that we were going to have the Good Government Councils (*Juntas de Buen Gobierno*)."

(Interview with José Luis, Autonomous Council Member, August 3, 2003. Text at the beginning of the Thesis of Alejandro Cerda Garcia:

"Imagining Zapatismo, Multiculturalism and Indigenous Autonomy in Chiapas from one Autonomous Municipality: 2011)

- 1.- This topic of inexhaustible richness cannot be seen in isolation from all of the processes of construction of alternatives to capitalism and the structures of colonial domination.
- 2.- Autonomy is an alternative to the model of colonial society, it is a way of organizing to stand up to relationships of power.
- 3.- Autonomy can not take root without resistance to domination and the mechanisms of control that make up the system of capital that subjugates and dominates, with the end goal of appropriating strategic resources and accumulating wealth for groups with local, national, and international power.
- 4.- Zapatista autonomy is part of the EZLN strategy to build an alternative to capitalism and domination on a global level.
- 5.- Zapatista autonomy would be meaningless if it wasn't built in terms of being an alternative to the neoliberal model.
- 6.- Zapatista autonomy is anti-systemic.
- 7.- It entails transcending war and wars.
- 8.- It is a construction of peace.
- 9.- It has to do with the future and humanity.

10.- The hope for humanity is in the construction of a new paradigm that respects life; a new form of dialogical communication with all beings and their relationships; not in the reproduction of the current system of power.

11.- What is present in the effort of Zapatista autonomy is the construction of a new world; an alternative society. It's about reaching these heights in relationships of production, in collective ownership of the means of production, in the ways of living, in expectations, in abilities, in the methods and mechanisms for resolving conflicts, in "leading by obeying", in "walking by asking", in the way of proposing solutions and in the need for growth.

12.- It requires work, study, training, understanding reality, organization, understanding the conditions in which we currently live; it requires structures of leadership and work plans.

13.- Growth similar to the growth of plants, permanent, imperceptible.

14.- The task of the construction of a new society is everyone's.

15.- It is not a task particular to the indigenous people and it has to do with being protagonists, being responsible and participating in the construction of alternatives to the structures of power that deny people dignity, that subdue, subjugate, dispossess, and impose models of society.

16.- We can take into account some of the elements that are necessary in the construction of autonomy:

- Being the protagonists of our own history.
- Equality within difference.
- Working to change the root of the problems: the relationships of power and domination.
- Equitable distribution of work.
- Equitable distribution of goods.
- Collective work.
- The decision of women and men.

- Respect for nature, for ourselves, both men and women.
- Agreements. Collective reason. Collective voice.
- Non-violence.
- Resistance to war.
- Justice and dignity.
- No impunity.

17.- The strength of Zapatista autonomy lies in that they are themselves. In being subjects. This is the permanent hope. The act of being themselves, both men and women, is a liberating act.

18. They build and they defend from the strength and determination of the communities.

19.- There are historical roots; there are millennial aspects to this capacity to be autonomous (like considering yourself to be part of the universe and to be situated at the center of the universe, just as the true men and women consider themselves) and because of this it seems natural that the indigenous people have placed themselves within the perspective that the defense of territory is the base of autonomy.

20.- Not in the sense of appropriation of resources but instead in the sense of the defense of resources for all of humanity.

21.- That is why autonomy has to do with the transformation of relationships of exploitation and with the search for alternatives to the depletion of resources.

22.- Zapatista autonomy is related to the construction of an alternative economy to capitalism; a solidarity economy.

23.- The base of this economy is territory, with all of its resources. The strategy of the neoliberal model is the appropriation of resources, their use and exhaustion. The concentration of power implied in this strategy involves the use of weapons: weapons of information, of political pressure and of control of territory. An economic, political, cultural and social control. The social movements have already

understood this and what we need now is to resist, create, construct, analyze, and act.

The process of the construction of autonomy of the indigenous people is made up of acts of resistance, of liberation, and of permanent construction.

24.- Autonomy consists of the responsibility that we assume to create spaces of freedom, in the capacity to transform relationships of submission, in establishing actions of solidarity in order to grow, in acting collectively to be strong and to not go back to the past.

25.- Within the great complexity of local, regional, and international relationships, the discovery of the potential of local actions is important, liberating acts and those of new worlds, that are created by the hands of all men and women.

26.- Collective work is a fundamental element in the construction of a Solidarity Economy and, consequently, in the process of autonomy of the indigenous people.

27.- Zapatista autonomy is the space for the construction of free citizens, responsible citizens, builders, conscious of the challenges that are theirs because they are part of a community, of an ethnic group, of a state, of a region, of a country and of the world.

28.- This concept of global responsibility is very important because it is the prospect for all of the alternatives to neoliberalism; the conditions are being created so that alternative models of society that are needed by all (men and women) can emerge.

29.- That is why the experiences of one community can be a contribution to the practice of searching for others, because it is necessary to find ways to live in harmony with nature, with peace, justice and dignity.

30.- Autonomy is a necessity for everyone, not just the indigenous people or agricultural communities. Autonomy is a the task of society in its entirety.

31.- In the Zapatista communities a process of construction of autonomy exists that comes from very long ago, starting from the time that the indigenous peasant farmers left the plantations where they lived in a situation of servitude. They have advanced in the practice of the construction of autonomy, in the social and political and ideological aspects; it is the construction of an enormous transformative

movement that allows them to resist the strategy of annihilation that comes from the established power.

Translation: Eva Schulte

José Jorge Santiago Santiago.

November 4, 2011.