




Community Government Systems

DR. GILBERTO LÓPEZ Y RIVAS, INAH - MORELOS






*“Every so often there are men and women
who rise up to think for others; who rebel
to demand land and freedom.”*

(Notes from the course Freedom According to the The Zapatistas)

Self-governments in their historical context

Contemporary indigenous governments must be understood in their historical context: a struggle of the original peoples to preserve and strengthen their territorial and cultural integrity and their natural resources through organizational forms based on the practice of a participative democracy that confronts —by means of an anti-systemic strategy—the rapacity and violence of capitalism in its current transnational neoliberal phase.






*“We have been doing the work.
What doesn't work we change. This is a process: a
people that does not organize itself has no
future.”*

(Apuntes)

Self-governments in Their Historical Context

They are a people that reclaim their origin and an identity—contrary to the national majority—and who have formed as autonomous subjects in the desire to imprint a sense of community in their lives in times where egoism, individualism and competitiveness is aimed at displacing solidarity, dignity and fraternity.





“In Zapatista territory, the laws of bad government do not work. Here, the people lead.”


(Notes)

Self-governments in Their Historical Context

The indigenous self-governments of Latin America are conceived as political-territorial spaces where the oppressed can consolidate their communitarian expressions of direct democracy in the local, regional and even national arenas.



Ejido Patria Nueva, Autonomous Municipality of Zapatista Rebels, Chiapas, Morelos




*“We have made mistakes,
but we learn through these mistakes to
govern as a collective.”*

(Notes)

Autonomous Subjects

Based on this premise, self-governments are considered forms of resistance and of conformation of an autonomous subject, which is constituted as an interlocutor that negotiates with the State. Simultaneously, if this fails, *de facto* self-governments are then established. Hence, self-governments are not granted, but rather conquered through organization and awareness, and through hard-fought uprisings and extensive mobilizations.






“All of us govern as a people, deciding what to do. If we organize ourselves with the Mexican people, we will be able to govern my obeying.”

(Apuntes)

Autonomous Subjects

Self-governments are not considered “libertarian islands within the capitalist universe”. In “Read a video”, the Zapatistas point out clearly: “Ours is not a liberated territory, nor a utopian commune. It is not an experimental laboratory of nonsense or a paradise of the orphaned Left.”





*“Our organization taught us to fight together.
Men and women. Prior to ‘94, the women were
already doing the work, in hiding. We are here
and we continue to fight.”*

(Notes)

Autonomous subjects

The indigenous people do not disseminate an idyllic image of their movements “assuming that these groups progress by jumping over all obstacles”, a critique that appears to be founded on a lack of empirical research and profound knowledge of indigenous autonomy.






“If something goes wrong, we make it better. It’s only been 19 years, against 520 years of oppression.”

(Notes)

The autonomous subject:

- ▶ Must be representative of the shared and general interests of the communities.
- ▶ Must have a defined territorial base and a socio-ethnic identity.
- ▶ Must be rooted in a communal foundation based on regional and supra regional identities; in other words: democratic communitarianism.
- ▶ Must be constituted as a legitimate or recognized interlocutor in negotiations with the State.
- ▶ The Zapatista process covers a broad scope in the formation of this subject, extending beyond the political-military organization.





*“Everyone is responsible for all areas of
the autonomy:
health, radio, education, women.”*


(Notes)

Dynamic nature



We highlight the dynamic, transformative nature of the processes that make up the autonomous indigenous governments, for in order to become such governments, they must modify participation in a diversity of dimensions: relationships between genders, between generations, in this case ensuring the protagonism of women and youth; democratizing the indigenous societies; and, politicizing and innovating their political and socio-cultural structures.





*“The commissions are not alone; they obey
the three levels of government: local,
municipal and regional.”*

(Notes)

Dynamic nature

The importance of women participating in the different levels and spaces of community and municipal life is emphasized, particularly as concerns decision-making bodies and the exercise of indigenous self-governments in the effort to achieve a more just and equitable society, developing concrete actions to combat all kinds of violence against indigenous women.



We demand our rights!



*“The Good Government Councils
have become another form of education.”*


(Notes)

Contemporary self-governments



The study of contemporary indigenous governments in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, from a comprehensive and comparative perspective, reveals the transformative nature of these processes, not only in their articulation, more often than not at odds with the existing national states, but also within the organization of the autonomous subjects themselves.





“The assemblies are where we decide to think of all others and not think of ourselves.”

(Notes)

Contemporary Self-governments


Therefore, it not only has to do with the existence of traditional indigenous self-governments that developed in diverse forms throughout the colony (the Republic of Indians) and independent life, and that continue to this day in many communities of the Latin American geography.

Contemporary self-governments

Nor is it about the powers and attributions established at the top, administratively or because of constitutional modifications, floors and ceilings of models that do not correspond to concrete realities and that convey the limitations of a social science that lags far behind social-ethnic processes.



champa san agustín mpio. auto-
nomo libertad de los pueblos mayas
está usted en territorio
rebelde zapatista aquí el
pueblo manda y el gobierno
obedece. Junta de buen go-
bierno hacia la esperanza,
zona selva fronteriza.



“The monitoring commissions in all of the good government councils are not for a lack of trust, but to be on top of what we are doing.” (Notes))


Lead by obeying

Current autonomous practices transcend further. For example, when the Zapatistas move beyond traditional self-governments and undertake them based on the seven principles of leading by obeying: *To serve, not self-serve; Represent, not replace; Construct, not destroy; Obey, not command, Propose, not impose; Convince, not defeat; Work from below and not seek to rise;* in addition to, the rotation of the roles of authority, the revocation of leadership...

Lead by obeying

... the planned and programmed participation of women and youth; the equitable and sustainable reorganization of the economy; the adoption of an anti-capitalist and anti-systemic political identity; and the search for national and international alliances that are aligned, a qualitative change takes place in the construction of autonomous governments, while transforming the indigenous peoples themselves through their regional appropriation of the territory and the extension of power from the bottom.






“We have tried not to become agitated to avoid responding to violence with violence. By not becoming agitated, we have won. Our strength is in our organization.”

(Notes)

Good Government Councils



To govern autonomously in 30 municipalities, linking them through the five Good Government Councils established in Oventic, La Realidad, La Garucha, Roberto Barrio and Morelia, reveals an organizational experience of government that must be taken up pedagogically by other indigenous peoples.



“We already bring resistance with us; resistance has allowed us to build autonomy. We are resisting, and at the same time, we are building.”


(Notes)



Good Government Councils

The autonomous municipalities and the good government councils form part of the best democratic traditions of the Mexican people and are a required reference when speaking of democratic governability.





“Bad government deceives us so that we will abandon our struggle. It wanted to dismantle the co-ops of our autonomous municipalities, but it did not dismantle our hearts. It was not the house that mattered, but the heart. Their heart was weak.”


Political parties



In the case of the Zapatistas, and in most of those studied in Latin America, we have proven that interference by political parties deteriorates autonomous governments, even causing them to fail...

Political parties

... In Mexico, the reservoir of votes that the official party (in the time of the State party system) imposed through the indigenous chiefdoms, is seriously affected by an indigenous movement that frontally rejects the current system of State parties and questions the deteriorating components of a managed democracy, imposing in its stead another collective way of carrying out politics.




“The counterinsurgency wants to weaken our organization. That is why we must think doubly. We stand for life, they stand for death. We are preparing for the future. We do not depend on anyone.”



Political parties

Representative democracy is the only democracy possible when rooted in the ethnocentrism of national society and denies all of the experience of direct democracies in the indigenous communities, which develop a political culture founded on resistance, the bedrock of current autonomous processes.



“They want to destroy the unity to break the organization. Parties divide, like a split apple.”


(Notes)

Pluri-ethnic governments



the Zapatista experience and the experience of other processes in Latin America show that the development of a consolidated multi-ethnic network of autonomous governments of communities and regions, and even of diverse peoples, is another one of the transcendent changes in the current conditions of autonomous governments, where intra-community struggles due to secular conflicts, boundaries or resources can be overcome to respond in a united way to the violent intrusion of the States and capitalist corporations, counterinsurgency and organized crime.





*“Bad government keeps trying to screw us,
but we’re big now; as Zapatistas, they
make us stronger.”*

(Apuntes)

Pluri-ethnic governments

All of the internal transformations, ruptures and redefinitions in the communitary, regional and national arenas are impossible without the consolidation and strengthening of the autonomous subject, which makes self-governments possible, with inward hegemonic affirmation capacities, so that they contribute to internal cohesion through the construction of consensus...

Gobiernos pluriétnicos

... participatory democracy, tolerance and the overcoming of religious, ethnic and political divisions, the fight against corruption and against cooptation attempts by the State and its agents. The subject incites the mobilization of peoples and communities to defend their rights and demands and is supported by a legitimate outward representation.





*“Your system is crap and bad government
is screwed because our struggle is real.”*

(Notes)


Hypothesis of a network

Contemporary autonomous indigenous governments are far from the stereotypes of autarchy that their adversaries predicted as inherent to this phenomena. On the contrary, as is observed in many Latin American countries, the irruption of indigenous peoples into the political events of their respective nations is an undeniable reality ...

Hypothesis of a network

...The processes propose substantial changes in the very nature of these nations as pluri-national, pluri-ethnic, pluri-cultural and pluri-linguistic entities, and reaffirm the indigenous as political subjects with indisputable collective rights as peoples and nationalities.





“Neoliberalism is modifying everything. They want to change the music, the way we talk and dress, our cultures. For them, money is the kingdom of life, but for us, money is not life.”

(Notes)

Hypothesis of a network

The autonomous Zapatista governments are responsible for justice, security, education, health, and culture, and maintain their authority at the community, municipal and regional levels, reaffirming the value and importance of political practices that materialize in community assemblies, roles systems, the *tequio* and, in general, community obligations and contributions ...

Hypothesis of a network

... Emphasis is placed on the importance of the articulation and interaction of indigenous communities and municipalities for the exercise of autonomy at the regional level, as guaranteed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and also, in the San Andrés Agreements of 1996.

Hypothesis of a network

The Latautonomy project maintains: "The hypothesis of the network.- The sustainability of an autonomous system depends on its ability to link the level of local communities with a regional structure in a horizontal and interactive manner. Through a process of integration from below, political (self-government) and participatory economic structures must be created that are articulated both inwardly in the multicultural autonomies and outwardly, generating an alternative society project ...

Hypothesis of a network

... This hypothesis is against any ethnocentric localism and against the hierarchical representations that prevent the development of participatory mechanisms in political decision making. Investigated Relationship: Politics - Culture (Participatory Democracy). Brief Formula: Network of Local Communities = Regional Structure."

Leo Gabriel y Gilberto López y Rivas.
EL UNIVERSO AUTONOMICO:
PROPUESTA PARA UNA NUEVA DEMOCRACIA.



The hypothesis of balance

Equally, the hypothesis of balance of the Latautonomy Project affirms: “In an autonomic system, which is a social process from which a new political subject emerges, there must be a balance between the political-judicial dimension, the cultural-intercultural dimension and the economic-ecological dimension. If an autonomic process is lacking in any of these dimensions (or overreaching in another), there is a risk of external actors (national State, landowners, transnational companies, etc.) penetrating the system, subverting it from within and destroying it.” (www.latautonomy.org/lae_wel.htm).

The hemispheric project of the United States

To think of autonomous governments and their relationship with Latin American nation-states also implies, for indigenous and non-indigenous movements, a theoretical and political responsibility with a national and anti-capitalist resistance to the hemispheric project that the United States and its allies intend to continuing imposing on the continent in the new expression of the globalization of capital.

United States Hemispheric Project

Latin America is being affected by projects, agreements and regional programs of US origin such as ASPAN, the Columbia Plan, the Merida Initiative, the America Command and various free trade agreements, as well as the corporate invasion, in its different economic, political and military economic modalities that form part of the new global configuration that has brought with it transnational globalization and a huge obstacle for the development of self-governments of indigenous peoples and citizenships.



New World Order

The so-called new world order that emerged, among other factors, from the crisis of "real socialism" and Keynesian economic models in capitalist countries, not only redefined the spheres of influence and intervention between the countries of the north and the south (formerly called developed and developing countries), but between the countries of the north themselves. The European Union and its predecessor, the European Economic Community, as well as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), emerged as paradigms of a new regional restructuring of capital.

New World Order

This has undoubtedly modified, at least in Latin America, the redefinition of the essence of the nation-states involved. Fundamental concepts of the nation-states such as sovereignty and independence have been placed on tenterhooks by the current economic model and indigenous peoples are contributing to envisioning transformations and effective forms of defense of national sovereignties.

World reconfiguration



Thus, the scope and role of autonomous governments in Latin American countries have also been affected by this global reconfiguration of capital and its borders.

World Reconfiguration

In fact, the coordinates through which current discussions about autonomous governments must traverse analyze how the hemispheric domination project of the United States—in its Obama and now Trump variants—intends to obstruct and even annihilate the existence of these governments as possible expressions of cultural, political, economic and administrative resistance.



Able to participate in the national processes

Nonetheless, in the case of Mexico, the struggle for autonomous governments is part of a national project that has been developing over many decades of exclusion, misery and discrimination against indigenous peoples. These self-governments are part of a national project, in which the autonomous subjects have sought integration with other sectors of Mexican society.

Able to participate in the national processes

Specifically, the EZLN has addressed students, peasants, workers, housewives, intellectuals, small entrepreneurs, wage earners, professionals of all races, all religions, and all ethnic groups to form a different nation where, as they say, "All worlds fit." They do not vindicate self-determination to give continuity to the structural marginalization with colonial and functional roots in the neoliberal globalization.

Able to participate in the national processes



The demands of self-government and self-determination are ways to achieve greater democracy, gender equity, to fight discrimination, to become integrated into an equitable market where indigenous peoples can freely sell their products and where they are considered citizens and recognized as political subjects able to participate in national processes.



Democratization processes



Consequently, autonomous governments are the expression of an alternative rethinking of national forms imposed from above by oligarchic groups based on integrationism-assimilationism or on differentialism-segregationism, which constituted equally provocative ethnocide policies and the denial of citizen rights to groups of indigenous peoples and communities.

Democratization processes

In this way, self-governments are processes of democratization, national articulation and political coexistence - from below - between heterogeneous groups in their ethnic-linguistic-cultural composition.



Confronting the State and Corporations


Because of its anti-systemic nature and the indigenous presence in territories coveted by the capital, in addition to the characteristics of current globalization, self-governments directly or indirectly confront the State, its institutions and repressive forces, its counterinsurgent strategies...

Confronting the State and Corporations


... the political, ideological, military and intelligence structures of imperialism; its economic corporations , including organized crime, which seeks to open territories, occupy them, appropriate their cultural, natural and strategic resources; and religious denominations, parties and political mechanisms aimed at penetrating, mediating and destroying self-governments and collective forms of decision and organization.

Confronting the State and Corporations

Hence, the precariousness and constant struggle to survive and develop, to extend its levels of intra-community, municipal, regional and national articulation, as well as to expand the areas of international resistance, solidarity and coordination.



It should also be noted that these autonomies do not establish a regime or a new level of government in all cases (with the exception of Nicaragua). They do not create corporate rights or privileges or reservations. Nor do they identify autonomous territories or an administrative division of specific territories in the national geography, as in the cases of Nicaragua or the Spanish State.



In the case of Mexico, specifically, the San Andrés agreements recognize the right of the people to autonomy within the framework of the Mexican State, and consequently, establish the internal competencies of the indigenous authorities, their obligations in the exercise of their competencies, and the shared and/or exclusive obligations of the federal, state and municipal governments.

However, the legal framework does not recognize the communitary and regional levels of government.



Teachings of Self-governments



The forms of political organization of direct democracy and self-governments arising from indigenous autonomic processes can not be applied as a formula for organizing national society and the State in its multiple spheres and complexities.

Teachings of the Self-governments

However, it is precisely the absence of society and the laborer in the exercise of power and state control, which characterized and, in part, quashed the experience of real socialism.

Teachings of Self-governments

In highlighting the participation of all the people in local, municipal and zonal governments or Good Government Councils, as, for example, in the case of the Zapatistas, the intention is not to generalize or idealize these forms of self-government given their limitations and the obstacles imposed by the counterinsurgency and the advancement of neoliberal expropriation.



Teachings of Self-governments

However, its existence in the Zapatista spaces is a reality that must prompt an analysis to conceive forms of citizen and popular organization and participation that can substitute the bureaucratic machinery that ignores the mandates of the majority. In this sense, how detrimental can it be in the struggle for the construction of socialism to defend self-organization and highlight solidarity and communitarian values?


Teachings of the Self-governments

In the case of the Zapatista maya, in particular, no apology is given for their experience nor is it proposed as a “model to follow” in the edification of the current and future society. Indigenous self-governments do not ignore the State nor the power that it exerts based on the monopoly of violence legalized by the legal framework “legitimized” by a class hegemony.



The Handover

- ▶ Over the last 20 years there have been multiple and complex handovers in the EZLN.
- ▶ Some as a result of the most obvious reason: the generational.
- ▶ Now those who were very young or were born during the uprising are the ones who are fighting and leading the resistance.
- ▶ But some researchers have not noticed the other handovers:
 - ▶ Those of class: from the enlightened middle class, to the indigenous peasant.
 - ▶ Those of race: from that of *meztizo* leadership to entirely indigenous leadership.
- ▶ And the most important: the handover of thought: from the revolutionary vanguardismo of leading by obeying; from the taking over of power to the creation of power at the bottom; from professional politics to daily politics; from the leaders, to the people; from the marginalization of gender to the direct participation of women; from the mockery of the other, to the celebration of differences.

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- ▶ It is our conviction and our practice that we do not need leaders or warlords or messiahs or saviours to rebel and fight; we need only a bit of shame, a bit of dignity and a lot of organization.
 - ▶ **And instead of dedicating ourselves to forming guerillas, soldiers and squadrons, we prepare education and health promoters and we begin to build the bases of an autonomy that amazes the world today.**