

Alternative Autonomies

Background

Autonomy has been a core ideal of the Zapatista movement since its inception. Municipalities in rebellion began to convert into autonomous municipalities as early as 1995, rejecting the authority of the Mexican state and serving as models of community organizing and democratic self-governance. While autonomy at the local level has characterized Zapatista communities since the beginning of the movement, in August 2003 they announced the formation of the Caracoles and five “Good Government Committees,” in an attempt to harmonize the governing of the five municipalities, minimize the influence of the EZLN, and put more control and decision making power in the hands of the community members. This internal reorganization display was in part to formalize the idea of “mandar obedeciendo,” which has been a belief held by many indigenous communities of Chiapas and predates the emergence of the Zapatistas.

Learning Objectives

The aim of this workshop is for participants to explore different interpretation of “autonomy” and arrive at their own definition of the term.

Preparation

Prior to the workshop, each participant is assigned a chapter from, “Mayan Lives Mayan Utopias: The Indigenous Peoples of Chiapas and the Zapatista Rebellion” edited by Jan Rus. The book is a collection of case studies on how Chiapas’ indigenous communities have created spaces of political and cultural autonomy in the years before and after the 1994 rebellion which each chapter chronicling the evolution of a different community’s experience.

Directions

Each participant is responsible for preparing a 10-15 presentation on his/her case study focusing on how autonomy is defined by the community as well as the mechanisms used to maintain and protect that autonomy. The facilitator should begin the session by leading a brief discussion of the term, "autonomy" and what it means to each participant. H/she should take notes during the discussion creating an initial definition of autonomy. After everyone has presented, the facilitator should led the group in discussing the various versions of autonomy and through this, the group should formulate a revised definition.

Texts

- Mayan Visions: The Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization, June C. Nash
- Autonomy: Source of Conflict or the Road to Peace
http://www.sipaz.org/fini_eng.htm

- The Path of the Caracol Towards Autonomy
http://www.sipaz.org/fini_eng.htm

Visuals

- Map: Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities
<http://www.ciepac.org/images/maps/caracol03.jpg>
- Map: Attacks against Autonomous Municipalities
<http://www.ciepac.org/images/maps/vsmunaut.gif>