

Them and Us VII. The Smallest of them All 4. The Compañeras: Taking on the cargo*

March 4, 2013

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The Smallest of Them All 4.

The Compañeras: Taking on the cargo*

**Cargo, a duty or task, refers here to a designated position of responsibility and authority.*

February 2013

There is nothing more subversive and irreverent as a group of women from below saying, to others and to themselves: “we.”

Don Durito

Note: Below are more fragments from the Zapatista women’s ‘sharing,’ only now the *compañeras* are discussing their work and the current problems that they face in their *cargos* of leadership, the teaching and carrying out of justice, and the managing of resources, along with some reflection on the thorny issue of “gender equity” in the construction of a world that proposes to be inclusive and tolerant, a world where “no one is more, no one is less.”

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(...)

Yes, we have had to settle cases like this. Once we had a case—I will comment here on what the other compañera already mentioned—when we had barely entered the Junta [Good Government Council], they put the two of us in charge of a team and a problem was brought to us. A compañera complained that she was being mistreated by her husband. It is an incredible story and it was a really ugly situation for us. The compañera said:

“I want a separation from my husband,” but this now ex compa already had two wives.

We investigated the situation. We called the children of the first wife and of the second, and from there we started to come up with a solution. That’s why it took us awhile, the situation was really messed up. We had asked the compañera:

“And what is it that he did to you?” thinking that he had only hit her.

No, this darned guy had hung the compañera from by her feet and hit her, same as with two of his other children. And so we had to find a solution. What was our solution? The compañera asked for a separation, so we did this by distributing their belongings between the first wife and her children, because it was the man who had committed the offense and we couldn’t leave her with nothing, and the second wife, because she already had a grown son. We didn’t leave anything to the man, we left the rest to the son so that our decision would be clear to the man. We divided up all of his things, this is how we solved the problem, we decided in favor of the compañera who had come to us to make her complaint.

Yolanda: *We’re going to continue with what I am to talk about, which is a little bit about the law [Women’s Revolutionary Law]. As you know, this law was created precisely to address the situation*

that the compañeras lived on a daily basis. This is why it was created, because before the law they suffered a lot, as we have already heard and I won't repeat now. This law is already written; we have it in the five caracoles.

(...)

But we see that it is very important that we study this law well, because if we don't really understand what it is that this law tells us, as we have discussed a little bit in this zone, the same history can repeat itself again, where it is forgotten that woman is the giver of life, as we have heard happened before. If we don't understand this law that we Zapatistas have, this could occur again.

This law was not made so that now women could give the orders, it wasn't so that women could dominate their husbands, their compañeros; this is not what it means. That's why we need to really study this law, because that is not the reality that we are going to create, nor do we want to follow the history that we have now, where the compañeros who are machistas [chauvinist] give the orders. But if we misinterpret this [law], the same thing could happen but where the compañeras will give the orders and the poor compañeros will be left out, and this is not what we want.

What we are after is something like a construction of humanity, this is what we are trying to change, and this requires another world. It is like the goal of everything we are doing, men and women, because as we have already heard, it isn't a woman's struggle and it isn't a man's struggle. When we're talking about revolution they must go together, among all men and women, that is how struggle is made.

It can't be that the compañeros say we are struggling here, making revolution, but only compañeros take on the cargos and the compañeras stay in the house. That is not a struggle for everyone. What we want is a struggle for everyone, men and women, this is what we want.

But let's be clear that we are still learning this first law, it still makes us a little dizzy, because the truth is that as compañeras it is still very difficult for us to take on a cargo, any cargo.

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(...)

You mentioned that there is a commission of honor and justice. What is its job and what is the role of the compañeras there?

*On the question of honor and justice and the role of the compañeras, just like in the municipality we take turns, we have two **consejas** [like council or advisor, female], two consejos [male], and one man and one woman assigned to honor and justice. So for example if a compañera has a problem, for example in the case of a rape, she would go talk to the compañera assigned to honor and justice. That compañera from the honor and justice commission then coordinates with the man on the honor and justice commission so that the compañera with the problem doesn't have to feel uncomfortable with the male compa. That is how the honor and justice commission works.*

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(...)

At the zone level, we have another example that is a job done especially by women compañeras. It is a women's initiative where they created a cafeteria-store, that is, they have a small cafeteria and a small grocery store. They started with a loan of 15 thousand pesos and hatched their idea for this project. The initiative was made by the regional and local leaders in coordination with the Junta, which supported them with tables, dishes, and other useful things for the cafeteria. Various people cooperated

to make this happen, but it was these *compañeras* who had the idea, did the work, and organized it all.

They began with 15 thousand pesos, they have organized their leadership responsibilities, and the *compañeras* in charge locally take turns at the zone level preparing and selling the food. They reported to us that, in their first business ever, they made a profit of 40 thousand pesos. With this 40 thousand pesos they could pay back the loan that they had taken out, which was 15 thousand pesos, and they had 25 thousand pesos left over.

Then they began to think that they were missing some of the things that they needed to round out the project. The Junta had supported them, as I said, with dishes and tables, but they began to think that with their earnings they wanted to improve things a little, and so they used these profits to better equip themselves. Now they are working like this, they have their leadership, the work rotates among the *compañeras*, and every year they change the makeup of the leadership. The communities control what is sold there, and they have informed us that they currently have 56,176 pesos in cash according to their last account balance.

All of this is work that we have been doing at the zone level, not with the objective to divide it up among ourselves or to spend these small funds that we are generating, but rather to be prepared for anything that we might need in the zone, for the things that will help us in the struggle.

(...)

We know that in the Tzeltal Jungle zone there are *compañeras* who are **comisariadas** (like commissioners), or *agentas*, how does it work there for these *compañeras* to be **comisariadas** and *agentas*, tell us, share with us how it is. Are there *compañeras* who function as local authorities? How do they do this? How do these *compañeras* work? Because there are also *compañeros* who are **comisariados** and *agentes*. What we want to do here is share how it is that we teach ourselves, help ourselves, prepare ourselves. In this case, especially with respect to the *compañeras*, how do the *compañera* authorities work in the communities?

What do the *compañeras* do in their communities as a **comisariada** or **agente**?

The **agentas**, for example, in my community, are the ones who watch over the community, who keep vigil over certain kinds of problems, things like small interpersonal issues, or problems with animals that cause harm or damages. It is the *agente* who is responsible for solving these types of problems. They also hold meetings to provide guidance on how to avoid problems with alcohol and drug addiction. These *compañeras* always participate, in every meeting, providing this guidance to avoid arriving at more serious problems. The **comisariadas** also hold meetings to discuss land issues—the care of the surrounding lands and the use of agro-chemicals. We planned all of this out as regulations that the **comisariadas** and *agentes* administer within the communities to maintain this control.

For the *compañeras* who have already become **agentas**, whose job is it to solve problems in the communities, can they already solve the problems themselves, or do they do it with the support of *compañeros*?

In my community, sometimes the *compañeras* request the support of a local authority to listen to an issue if they aren't sure how to participate, so they may ask for counsel. That happens often, but there are times when they [the authorities] aren't there and the *compañeras* do it alone. For example, in my community, the *agente* is a *compañera*, and so is the substitute *agente*, and so the two of them have resolved problems themselves. As they have seen it done a few times, they follow this example and create solutions.

(...)

Of the 60 members, are they half *compañeras* and half *compañeros*?

Yes compañero, we are half and half, no one is more, no one is less.

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(To be continued...)

I testify.

From the mountains of Southeastern Mexico.

Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos.

Mexico, February 2013.

“[Tierra y Libertad](#),” by the group “FUGA.” The song begins with a fragment of the EZLN’s words in the Mexican Congress, demanding compliance with the San Andrés Accords. An indigenous woman gave our Zapatista word there. The group FUGA is comprised of Tania, Leo, Kiko, Oscar and Rafa. The song can be found on the album “Rola la lucha Zapatista.”

[Mapuche women](#) in resistance against predatory mining companies.

[Zapatista women](#) in their *cargos* in the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* in La Realidad, Chiapas, in 2008.