

*By applying Galtung's Basic Human Needs (BHN) based model of conflict formation, analyse a current or past conflict that is visibly manifested in the form of direct violence.*

### **Unfulfilled Basic Human Needs Leads to the EZLN Uprising**

The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) formed in its majority by indigenous people did its first appearance in 1994 to say: "no more!" to the direct and structural State violence they have historically suffered.

They stormed six cities in the southeastern state of Chiapas, Mexico, where they seized and occupied governmental buildings, expelled government officials, vanished large estate owners and declared war against the Mexican army. The First Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle, press release of the insurgent group, not only declared war against the Mexican state, fact that was widely divulged, but it details the actual reasons for the Zapatista uprising. (Comandancia General del EZLN, 1994).

Continued coloniality, even after Mexican independence, has been imposed to the ~10% of Mexicans who identify themselves as indigenous. Enslavement and tributary rule were imposed to most of the indigenous people in the state of Chiapas shortly after the Spanish invasion, which placed it under control of the Captaincy of Guatemala.

When Chiapas became part of the Mexican Empire in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, its orography made it hardly accessible from the center of the country and infrastructure federal programs had poor effects here. Until this day, Chiapas remains as the most impoverished state in Mexico.

The agrarian distribution, main outcome of the Revolution struggle in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, promised to give back their ancestral territory, but a constitutional reform in the early 1990's cancelled it and transformed their territories in private land.

In order to dissect and map this struggle, throughout his work, Galtung identifies four axes of human needs, namely: security, welfare, freedom and identity. A fifth dimension that relates to the environment is indeed required in the analysis as human existence is not viable without it. (Galtung, 1990: 292).

But the fifth dimension is the cornerstone of the Zapatista struggle, not because of possession (or lack of it), but because the territory is at the core of their social life, what constitutes their culture. Here is where the cultural violence takes place, which whether direct or structural, is understood as harmful action or threat against the basic human needs and that prevents its realization. (Galtung, 1990: 292).

#### **Freedom**

The dispossession of their territory implies that agricultural activities are subordinated to landowners of vast extensions, where peasants are obliged to pay rent and bargain away their production in the massive market. They are not free to decide what to cultivate, nor even less what is for their own consumption, undermining their food safety.

#### **Identity (alienation)**

The lack of land ownership also leads to the erosion of their social fabric by the removal of their traditional ways of organization, basically defined by the milpa, which refers to the communal use of land in which a community decides, according to the native seeds and seasonality, what crops are cultivated and when, and the rightful distribution of the harvest among the population who would have a defined division of labor.

#### Well-being

Their forced introduction in the capitalist model means the extirpation of their self-sustainable social organization and places them in an obvious path to impoverishment in the economic sphere, that is exacerbated by the deficient infrastructure of medical and schooling services, where traditional educational and healing practices are not only censored but even persecuted and silenced.

#### Survival

All the above forms of violence are in good measure structural or indirect, but repeated peaceful manifestations of inconformity with precedents since the 16<sup>th</sup> century up to the decade of 1990's have been directly repressed. (Farmer, 2012).

#### References

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