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**The University of San Francisco
Master of Arts in International Studies**

**Master's Thesis Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects
Spring 2022
"Los De Abajo Reconstruimos": Zapatismo & Indigenous Gender Transformation
San Francisco Bay Area
Elizama Rodas
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“Los De Abajo Reconstruimos”: Zapatismo & Indigenous Gender Transformation

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS
in
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by Elizama Rodas
June 3, 2022

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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Abstract

Indigenous women's voices have long been silenced in society, including the academic realm. The brutality of colonization toward Indigenous women's gender and racial identities has kept them isolated and suppressed up to the present time. For the last twenty-seven years, the Ejército Zapatista Liberación Nacional (EZLN) of Chiapas, Mexico, has campaigned against the Eurocentric ideologies that permeated post-colonization and influenced the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples significantly the discrimination of Indigenous women and other non-binary genders outside these Eurocentric definitions. This research aims to determine the effects of colonial gender existence and, through its deconstruction, also examines the destruction of environments. This project examines an interpretive approach and uses primary sources such as the EZLN Enlace archive to voice Indigenous resistance. This research demonstrates the solidarity to decolonize and bridge anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchy movements with principles of Zapatismo and build spaces and futures where many environments and humans thrive or, as they say, A World Where Many Worlds Fit.

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I humbly extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Zapatistas in Chiapas, the Ohlone people, and all the Indigenous whose territories we have devastated. I will strive to continue learning and hearing those left out and voiceless. Together we are strong. 'Para Todos Todo, Para Nosotros Nada' ('Everything for Everyone, Nothing for Us')

In solidarity,
Elizama

INTRODUCTION: ‘Sin Mujeres No Hay Revolución’

“Many years ago, there was equality between men and women because there wasn’t one who was more important than the other. Inequality began little by little with the division of labor, when the men became those who went to the field to cultivate food, went hunting to complement our food supply, and women stayed in the house to do domestic work, as well as the weaving and spinning of clothes and the making of kitchen utensils like pots, glasses, clay plates. Later another division of work arose when some people began to work in livestock. Cattle began to serve as a form of money, they were used as exchange. With time this activity became the most important, even more so when the bourgeoisie arose, who dedicated themselves to buying and selling in order to accumulate profits. All of this work was done by men, and that is why it is men who rule the family, because only the man earned money for family expenses, and the work of women was not recognized as important. That’s why women were viewed as less, weak, incapable of work.”¹ - Compañera Ana, EZLN

Gazing through their balaclavas, Indigenous insurgents of all genders took over the streets of San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico. A small-framed Indigenous woman named Comandanta Ramona was at the center and led the taking of the streets in 1994². That day, the world heard of the Ejército Zapatista Liberación Nacional (EZLN), an autonomous movement that reiterated 'there is no revolution without women.' The *compañeras* (women commander), Maya Indigenous Zapatista women who joined the clandestine army, demanded equal rights and to live life with human dignity. The perseverance of these Indigenous women are the heart of this revolutionary insurgency that took up arms along with the compareños, Maya Indigenous Zapatista men, and compareñaos, Zapatista gender-fluid identity, on that dawn of January 1st. Scarcely noted by national and international reports, the *compañeras* proclaimed the *Women's Revolutionary Law*, ten laws that recognized the Indigenous women's rights to their

¹ Compañera Ana, “Them and US. Vii.- the Smallest of Them All 3.- the Compañeras. the Long Path of the Zapatistas.V,” Enlace Zapatista, March 2, 2013, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2013/03/02/them-and-us-vii-the-smallest-of-them-all-3-the-companeras-the-long-path-of-the-zapatistas/>.

² Sylvia Marcos, “La Ley Revolucionaria De Mujeres Del Ezln - VientoSur,” 2012, https://vientosur.info/wp-content/uploads/spip/pdf/la_ley_revolucionaria_de_mujeresdecideci.pdf.

autonomy. The Zapatistas' bottom-up democratization attended to the discrimination against women long been overlooked. For the Zapatista women, the struggle for freedom begins at home in their communities striving towards regaining their origins and collective social fabric. Sharing their history with the world sparked new ways of thinking for many other women who listened and retaliated against Eurocentric colonialism. Women were encouraged to speak against the oppressive patriarchy that perpetuates gender violence and silences their presence. After 500 years of abuse and historical erasure, they said, *Ya Basta!* (Enough is Enough!), the Zapatista women have won their rights to be present.

Being a woman of mixed Mexican-Salvadorian heritage, I have questioned why my culture devalues my gender compared to men. It has urged me to question such origins of the heteronormative patriarchal power structures that underpins my culture. I have come to find that these power structures are subtle and intertwined to reinforce themselves through social, cultural, and economic institutions that reproduce patriarchal practices and validate its presence through intersubjective relations. In uncovering such origins' complexity, I have encountered the lineage of this social arrangement that begins from the pervasive discrimination of Indigenous women in Latin America that excludes women and non-binary voices and leadership roles. At the same time, it also reveals that their resistance has long been present but removed in Eurocentric history. Thereby, the Zapatistas say without women, there is no revolution (*sin mujeres no hay revolution*).

Eurocentric social order has reinforced the cultural biases that justify the discrimination of gender abuse, violence, and killings, such as the sexual assault of 23 women by police during La Otra, the People's Front in Defense of the Land in San Salvador Atenco.³ In Latin America,

³ School for Chiapas, "Zapatista Timeline," Schools for Chiapas, April 12, 2021, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/teach-chiapas/zapatista-timeline/>.

the term femicide is well known and the practice continues to take the lives of many Latin American women daily. In March of 2022, thousands of Mexican women protested on the streets of Mexico City over the surge of gender-base killings.⁴ Similarly, women, girls, and two-spirits of American Indian and Alaska Native suffer equal consequences as reports show they are ten times higher of being murdered.⁵ These horrific killings have prompted the movement of MMIW- Murdered & Missing Indigenous Women that traces back to colonization.

Zapatista recognizes the importance of Indigenous heritage and roots and seeks to redress the immorality introduced by the power dynamics of colonization, including the repression of women. In transforming the social relation between women, *otras*, and society the Zapatista promotes the decentralization of power to empower those who are most deprived from their autonomy and self-determination. The Zapatistas recognize the process of social change comes with time, therefore, their practice emphasizes change as a steady transformation, changing patiently at a revolutionary snail-like pace, working determinedly to recapture unique relationships that respect all life and thus embrace broader perspectives of gender and equitable communities.

Chiapas Demographics

Chiapas peasants have a long tradition of organizing due to Mexico's modernization and development policies that have shamelessly left the Indigenous population destitute. This southernmost state of Mexico is one of the richest in natural resources, yet, it is the second most marginalized state. It houses around 5.5 million people half the population is Indigenous Mayan,

⁴ Jorge Antonio Rocha, "Thousands Protest Femicides in Mexico on International Women's Day," Anadolu Ajansı, March 3, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/thousands-protest-femicides-in-mexico-on-international-womens-day/2528369>.

⁵ Felicia Bartley and Isleta Pueblo, "MMIW," Native Womens Wilderness, 2016, <https://www.nativewomenswilderness.org/mmiw>.

primarily Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Ch'ol, Zoque, Tojolabal, Kakchiquel, Mocho, and Mam.⁶ A 2016 article, “Mexico’s Indigenous Population Continues to Face High Rates of Poverty”, recorded that “the probability of death due to preventable death is 181 percent higher in rural areas with concentrated indigenous populations.”⁷ In addition, “the infant mortality rate is 50 percent higher among indigenous children than it is among the non-indigenous. Children who survive this increased infant mortality rate have higher levels of malnutrition. Notably, 44 percent of indigenous children are malnourished....”⁸ Additionally, the state’s poor infrastructure is especially notable in Indigenous communities, where there is a lack of clean water, sanitation, schools, health clinics, or medical insurance. *The Yucatan* newspaper estimated 81.7 percent of children live below the poverty line.⁹ Half of the Indigenous population “reports no income at all and another 43 % make less than \$5 a day.”¹⁰

This economic instability is closely linked to the Spanish colonial systems of royal land grants (*encomienda*) and grants of Indigenous labor (repartimiento) that granted land and Indigenous labor to the Spanish crown. After the 1810 Spanish Independence, like most of Mexico, Chiapas government policies focused on benefiting the ruling elites. Mexico’s 1910 revolution and land reform took decades to reach Chiapas, resulting in limited communal land distribution (*ejidos*) and thousands of Indigenous people being forced off fertile land and pushed towards the sparsely populated Lacandon jungle. Indigenous peasants continue to labor on *fincas*

⁶ “Chiapas: Economy, Employment, Equity, Quality of Life, Education, Health and Public Safety,” Data México, 2020, <https://datamexico.org/en/profile/geo/chiapas-cs>.

⁷ Heath, Hilary. “Mexico’s Indigenous Population Continues to Face High Rates of Poverty.” *Panoramas*, June 15, 2016. <https://www.panoramas.pitt.edu/health/mexicos-indigenous-population-continues-face-high-rates-poverty>.

⁸ Heath, Hilary. “Mexico’s Indigenous Population Continues to Face High Rates of Poverty.” *Panoramas*, June 15, 2016. <https://www.panoramas.pitt.edu/health/mexicos-indigenous-population-continues-face-high-rates-poverty>.

⁹ Hilary Heath, “Mexico’s Indigenous Population Continues to Face High Rates of Poverty,” *Panoramas*, June 15, 2016, <https://www.panoramas.pitt.edu/health/mexicos-indigenous-population-continues-face-high-rates-poverty>.

¹⁰ Iker Reyes Godelmann, “The Zapatista Movement: The Fight for Indigenous Rights in Mexico,” Australian Institute of International Affairs, 2014, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/news-item/the-zapatista-movement-the-fight-for-indigenous-rights-in-mexico/>.

(large estates of land) under challenging conditions and the arduous demands of ranchers and *caciques* (political bosses). They fabricated the absence of necessities and enslaved them to a peonage system. A system that has long been outlawed lingered in the south and east of Chiapas due to its isolated rural region and the manipulation of elite landowners that excluded the publication of new laws issued out of Mexico City. The manufacture need for austerity secured their command, and they faced very little opposition to avoid their demands.¹¹ The government's inadequacy to ensure the pro-peasant reforms and negligence in changing colonial systems caused the Indigenous population continual hardship.

The development of the state of Chiapas has directly left the Indigenous living below standards, but its effects are alarmingly worse for Indigenous women. The majority of their population suffers from extreme poverty, high mortality rates from preventable disease, and congenital malnutrition, the highest levels being among girls. A study found that among twelve-year-old girls, none presented a normal nutritional condition, while boys of the same age had a slightly better percentage of 39.4 percent. Additionally, women are estimated to give birth to more than seven children; however, inadequate feeding and congenital undernourishment affect the size of the population, particularly Indigenous women.¹² Their plight is constant due to the higher poverty levels and economic insecurity. The historical marginalization and the constant abuse of the Indigenous population reveal that Indigenous women endure such hardship to a greater degree. This realization brought their contention to bear arms in the EZLN uprising and no longer be enslaved under the brutal economic system that endorses the heteropatriarchy rule. The demands of the *compañeras* surface with the Zapatista concept of *Zapatismo*, giving

¹¹ George Allen Collier and Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello, *Basta!: Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2005), pg. 29.

¹² Margara Millan, "Zapatista Indigenous Women," in *Zapatista!: Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 64-80, pg. 65.

them new meaning to their identity and Indigenous struggle and, importantly, allowing the visibility of Indigenous people as political actors.

Zapatismo

In Western terms, the concept of Zapatismo is hard to define clearly. The Zapatistas' flexible and altering practice of Zapatismo is more inclined to an act of a rebel force confronting and resisting power, simultaneously reconquering life. Zapatistas have define this concept as:

“ Zapatismo is not a new political ideology or a rehash of old ideologies.

Zapatismo is nothing, it doesn't exist. It only serves as a bridge, to cross from one side to the other. So everyone fits within Zapatismo, everyone who wants to cross from one side to the other. Everyone has his or her own side and other side. There are no universal recipes, lines, strategies, tactics, laws, rules or slogans. There is only a desire: to build a better world, that is, a new world.” - The Clandestine

Revolutionary Indigenous General Command of the EZLN.¹³

Zapatismo, then, is a process of discovery that each community finds by prioritizing humanity and seeking revolutionary self-governing ways. Its process is best theorized by seven principles that I will later discuss under the system of governance. Contrary to the hyper-individualistic Western world, Zapatismo is a collective way of socially living that does not seek power, nor is it a model but rather a deep intuition rooted in dignity that broadens the horizon for actions. This is done by insisting on a dignified life and promoting “the act of naming problems and solutions into a collective and common process.”¹⁴ Together Zapatismo creates language, practice, and ethical compassion and opens spaces to live in transformative ways that collectively reconnect

¹³ Luis Hernández Navarro, “Zapatismo Today and Tomorrow - Schools for Chiapas,” School for Chiapas, 2004, <https://www.schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Zapatismo-Today-and-Tomorrow-Understanding-the-Rebellion.pdf>.

¹⁴ Navarro

and channel ecological relationships that secure the wellbeing of the social community together with the environment.

Therefore, I contend that the research of gender inequality transcends an issue affecting Indigenous people or women and extends beyond transnational borders, affecting the survival of human environments. The consequences of colonial powers upon modern nation-states uncover a massive extractive economy endorsed by neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a political approach that favors the privatization and the commodification of common property such as forests, water, and biodiversity and enforces authority to protect its domination. It produces environmental degradation and human dislocation. Scholars like Macarena Gómez Barris have named extractive zones, areas of primitive accumulation that operated through Native and Afro-descended lands, bodies, histories, and archaeologies.¹⁵ Corporate greed has targeted these diverse and rich ecologies, and governments act to protect the interest of the elite. At the same time, enforce authoritative power to sabotage and suppress environmental land and water rights defenders.

Literature Review

Applying Zapatismo to the colonial development of modern nation-states examines the naturalness of racism, sexism, and classism that limits our ways of being and thinking. Crucial to this project was the need to decolonize from the singularity of Eurocentric knowledge that represses non-European ways of life- identities, consciousness, and bodies such as the Indigenous. In this regard, I situate the work of decolonial theorists, intersectional feminism, and Indigenous struggles as significant to this type of research that deconstructs the Eurocentric power dynamics ingrained in post-colonial cultures and reproduces violence against women and identities outside binary norms. Such as the work of Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano brought

¹⁵ Gomez Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

to light the term coloniality of power as the structure that keeps nation-states maintaining colonial domination. The critical writings of Argentine philosopher and semiotician Walter D. Mignolo and his argument of colonial modernity as warfare against non-European cultures and the embracing of Indigenous knowledge to contend against it. The influential scholarship of Argentine feminist philosopher María Lugones amplified the coloniality of power with the intersects of gender. Moreover, Puerto Rican scholar Nelson Maldonado-Torres delinking between power and ontology in what he terms the colonial of being.

Research Question & Approach

This research project examines the intersection of colonial heteropatriarchy and racial inequity and its deconstruction through decoloniality. The question that guides me is how the Ejército Zapatista Liberación Nacional (EZLN) decolonial movement addresses gender and sexuality within the Indigenous element conceptually and practically. Moreover- how does Zapatistas' push for solidarity play into the question of gender and power?

In parallel with decolonization, the Zapatistas found it essential to liberate their consciousness from Western and European imperialism that has long rejected their cultural existence. A decolonial approach disrupts colonial power structures that normalize and authorizes the social expectation of homogenous European culture and, therefore, permit the reclaiming of Indigenous identities. The Zapatistas have taken control over their Indigenous identity by gaining tremendous respect and learning to be conscious of their life, culture, roots, history, and becoming aware of their reality.¹⁶ Indigenous Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that colonial research has long demeaned Indigenous as spectacles of the wild. To move away and in subversion to dignify Indigenous ways of knowing, we must “decolonize our minds,

¹⁶ Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena, “Comandante Javier: Mensaje a La Mesa ‘Estudiantes y Zapatismo,’” *Enlace Zapatista*, February 24, 2015, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2003/11/27/comandante-javier-mensaje-a-la-mesa-estudiantes-y-zapatismo/>.

to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity.”¹⁷ As a critic of colonialism and influencing a new way to do Indigenous research, Smith explains the process of doing Indigenous research by applying humbleness, transparency, recognition, respect, and appreciation for the Indigenous community being researched.

To decolonize my research project, I seek to detach from the western homogenization that many non-Europeans like myself learned to admire. I am careful to attend to my positionality as a first-generation Mexican-Salvadorian woman from the United States that has been educated and disciplined in western culture. I have realized how Western culture has minimized cultures like mine in Latin America and learned to consciously resist and reevaluate my identity, history, language, and philosophies of life. Mainly, I am seeking to accept and respect other forms of knowledge. A process decolonial theorist Mignolo has termed delinking from the structures of power. Mignolo emphasizes, “... decolonial thinking and doing focus on the enunciation, engaging in epistemic disobedience and delinking from the colonial matrix in order to open up decolonial options—a vision of life and society that requires decolonial subjects, decolonial knowledges, and decolonial institutions.”¹⁸ Additionally, Anthropologist professor Mariana Mora’s decade-long research within the Zapatista community has embraced what Subcomandante Marcos (a representative of the EZLN) has welcomed as research at the service of the people and “provided benefits to the communities.”¹⁹ Encountering Zapatismo has made me mindful of recognizing broader avenues of being. Furthermore, it has provided me with the possibility of one day living collectively in harmony.

¹⁷ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1st Edition (New York, NY: Zed Books, 1999), pg. 23.

¹⁸ Walter D. Mignolo, in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 2-3, pg. 9.

¹⁹ Mariana Mora, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 2017), pg 40.

In conducting a decolonial research project about the Indigenous people of Chiapas, I was careful to put aside western normative assumptions. To do this, I center the words of the Zapatistas themselves as the driving force of this analysis, including and most importantly, the Zapatista Indigenous women. These quotes are used in hopes of transmitting their voices as accurately as possible and introducing language and value to their way of life. Through these quotes, I seek to demonstrate their strength which breaks barriers and establishes solidarity across all the different forms and expressions of beings. In this respect, I examine Indigenous histories, cultures, languages, and perspectives in a manner that amplifies Indigeneity.

Much of the information I gathered for my project was through three essential sources that intend to educate, promote unity, and support the EZLN movement. The primary source used was the Zapatista communique disseminated through Enlace Zapatista, an accessible web archival that circulates transparent news about the EZLN Indigenous announcements and connects the global world with the Zapatista struggle. The Enlace archival communique publishes the EZLN Buen Gobierno (Good Governance) announcement, words from the Congreso Nacional Indígena (National Indigenous Congress), and updated news from their Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena-Comandancia General del EZLN (Clandestine Revolutionary Indian Committee-General Command of the EZLN-CCRI-CG). The Enlace also contains key speeches, stories, international news, international workshops, and critical gatherings for women. This website houses historical archival dating back to 1993 and has made the world aware of their enlightened way of organizing and collectively working together.

Another key source was the School for Chiapas (SC), a non-profit organization dedicated to grassroots activists supporting the EZLN struggle and creating a world where all worlds fit. SC has helped raise funds and supported the construction of Zapatista center Indigenous Mayan

schools in Chiapas. Based out of San Diego, California, their effort in the west focuses on educating the community about Zapatismo and building connection and solidarity. Their accessible and easy-to-navigate website has allowed me to grasp a timeline and provide library access to other academic resources writing about the EZLN.

Lastly, another significant source of information was the Chiapas Support Committee (CSC) of Oakland; like SC, it has helped fund the Zapatista community centers within the EZLN autonomous zone. Comparably, it also serves as a Zapatista educational site with secondary source material written by people who have a deep interest in advocating for peace and justice. CSC provides a space for discussion through public events like CompArte, a Zapatista Art with film & solidarity. It also advocates for the EZLN movement by supporting its international solidarity, as shown during the Zapatista November 17th Day of Action in solidarity with Zapatista Communities against denouncing and demanding an end to the Mexican paramilitary violence. Another reflection of this was the December 22nd Acteal protest in memory of the 45 massacres in the Indigenous community of Acteal, Chiapas. The event was held in front of the San Francisco Mexican Consulate. Additionally, they assist with an educational language center that serves as a communication exchange among diverse people and cultures. This CSC collective allowed me to understand the reality of the Indigenous in Chiapas. During our open discussions, I deepened my empathy toward the struggles and connected them with my struggle here in the west.

Chapter Outline

I begin with the effects of settler colonialism and its exercise of power based on racism and discrimination of Indigenous people like the Mayas and its contrasting conflict with Indigenization. Chapter one thus deals briefly with the history of Indigenous persecution and

how the fight for life begins with exercising autonomy over their land. Land allows Indigenous people to re-govern their education, transmit traditional knowledge, access Indigenous and western medicinal health, and practice their centuries-long justice system and democratic governance. Territory for the Mayas and many Indigenous worldwide has become a symbol of resistance and in defense of mother earth and life. Chapter two will then navigate the extractivist economy of neoliberalism practices. This is a policy model that uses authority and paramilitary force to repress Indigenous voices and particularity in threatening Indigenous women who are the vanguard of land resistance while contributing to the impacts of the reproduction of gender violence towards them. Chapter three will conclude by highlighting national and international solidarity. Moreover, emphasizing the different forms of building sustainable futures that ultimately create gender equity and building a world that has room for many worlds, *'Un Mundo Donde Quepan Muchos Mundos'*; one which seems incapable of existing through capitalist and socialist means.

So here I begin to dissect the colonial systems that bind binary gender norms to cultural norms as a tool of oppressive measures to keep Eurocentrism and heteropatriarchal dominance around the world. A system that affects my self-worth and displaces my self-determination, something I have questioned throughout my life as it alters my free will to be and silences that rebellious intuition. As Chicana queer feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa wrote about the discontent and rebellious movements inside of her.

“Esos movimientos de rebeldía que tenemos en la sangre nosotros los mexicanos surgen como ríos desbocados en mis venas. Y como mi raza que cada en cuando deja caer esa esclavitud de obedecer, de callarse y aceptar, en mi esta la rebeldia encimita de mi carne. Debajo de mi humillada mirada está una cara insolente lista para explotar. Me costó muy caro mi rebeldía-acalambrada con desvelos y dudas, sintiéndome inútil, estúpida, e impotente.”²⁰ - Anzaldúa

²⁰ Anzaldúa Gloria, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera* (San Francisco, Ca: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), pg. 15.

“Those movements of rebellion that we Mexicans have in our blood arise like runaway rivers in my veins. And like my race that from time to time drops that slavery of obeying, of being silent and accepting, in me is the rebellion on top of my flesh. Beneath my humiliated gaze is an insolent face ready to explode. My rebellion cost me dearly-cramped with sleeplessness and doubts, feeling useless, stupid, and powerless.”- Anzaldua

Chapter 1: 500 years of Struggle, Autonomy & Land

The 15th-century Spanish conquest of the Americas impelled a wave of European exploration to hunt for gold, silver, and precious metal. Its process decimated and removed natives inhabiting those territories. Colonialism's violent hunger to enhance their power and coercively influence global affairs demanded the spread of a type of economic control and the eradication of Indigenous cultures and their ways of understanding life with the land. Eurocentric hegemony has influenced a dominant world view that prioritizes the wealth of those economies and exists only through the social inequities of the majority. The English industrial revolution of the 1700s further transformed the global economy and expanded to a capitalist economy that significantly changed the importance of money and its relationship to humans. Consequently, its founding had a ripple effect around the world.²¹

Historically, coloniality's violent appropriation of land and exploitation of Indigenous and African labor became the dominant method used to facilitate their control over foreign territory. Both Indigenous and African homes and cultures were vastly destroyed and altered, impacting their identity. Quijano theorizes these historical processes are pivotal moments where colonialism founded the fundamental model of power for nation-states and what he terms the matrix of power. Within this matrix of power, nation-states retain power, control, and hegemony over others. Quijano claims, “Every power structure always involves, partially or totally, the

²¹ Ariel Salleh et al., *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (New Delhi, NCT: Tulika Print Communication Services Pvt., Limited, 2019), pg 51.

imposition by some (usually a particular small group) over the rest.” The structure of power is foundational to four main spheres- the disputes over the control of labor and its resources and products, sex and its resources and products, authority and its specific violence, and intersubjectivity and knowledge.²² The *encomienda* system secured the Spanish conquistadors and their descendants' control over Indigenous communities and all resources within those areas. Vastly similar to the European feudal system, the *encomienda* was a method the Spanish crown granted the conquistador land and labor as a form of repayment. In exchange, the Spanish pacify their violent conquest by granting conquistadors the 'care' of the Indigenous people, forcefully converting them to Christianity. However, the care of Indigenous people was falsely maintained and merely became a way to exploit their labor and physically abuse Indigenous people.

The Spanish established ranches and introduced cattle, wheat, pigs, chickens, sugar, and other European products.²³ By the 18th century, each town specialized in a specific product or trade such as hide, pottery, weaving cloth, or growing tobacco, cochineal, or cacao. The Spanish collected its vast amount of wealth from tribute goods and the labor of Indians.²⁴ As years went by, Chiapas reoriented into a state of raw materials for new industries and foods for growing cities. Commodities such as timber and coffee became valuable cash crops that transformed the economic landscape of Chiapas.²⁵

During the late 1800s, a series of laws made it possible for impoverished native communities to be bought out by non-Indigenous seeking to purchase communal lands. The government imposed heavy taxes and fines that additionally left them hooked on debt loans and with no other alternative “but to sell their labor to enganchadores- professional agents who

²² Quijano, Anibal. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533-580. muse.jhu.edu/article/23906. p. 557.

²³ George Allen Collier and Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello, *Basta!: Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2005), pg. 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.* pg 20.

²⁵ *Ibid* pg. 25.

advanced debtors' loans and sent them to work off their debts on plantations or on urban construction projects."²⁶ This forced many Indigenous people to work in *haciendas/fincas* (large colonial estates) and manipulate their enslavement as peons under the claim of debts. These large ranches controlled the areas where Indigenous became enslaved in a cycle of indentured servitude. Indigenous people had very little control over their employment and conditions in this coercive economic practice.²⁷ From 1876 to 1910, during the Porfiriato years of dictator Porfirio Díaz, the nation's modern development was at the expense of villages and communities whose lands were stolen, and citizens became impoverished workers. Díaz permitted foreign and national entrepreneurs to take control of laws allowing them to free up land, labor, and natural resources, much like the open-market restructuring of 1994s NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement).²⁸

Presently, colonial Eurocentric legacies continue to control the multiple aspects of Mexican rural life by enforcing and following discriminatory policies derived from the colonial ruling. The PRI agrarian reform laws left many political changes in the same situation. Caciques have close ties to public officials of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), a Mexican political party that held uninterrupted power in Mexico for 71 years and has greater power in their local region. Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos describes the *Finca* named Campo Grande, a *Finca* that contained 1,000 plus hectares of fertile land, precious wood, and abundant water source to supply cattle.

“ The owner of Campo Grande was Segundo Ballinas, known among the residents as an assassin, rapist and exploiter of indigenous, primarily of women, boys and girls. Later, the finca was divided up: one part was called Primor, and its owner was Javier Castellanos, one of the founders of the Owners Union of the Segundo Valle of Ocosingo, one of those associations the finqueros used to disguise their

²⁶ Ibd pg 27.

²⁷ Ibd pg 27.

²⁸ Ibd pg 27.

white guards. Another part was called Tijuana, and its owner was a Colonel in the Mexican Army, Gustavo Castellanos, who kept the people subjugated with his personal guard. And another part was the property of José Luis Solórzano, a member of the PRI and their candidate for different offices, known in the region for his unfulfilled promises, his brazen lies and his arrogant and contemptuous treatment of the indigenous. And so, the Powers in Chiapas in short: finqueros, army and PRI-Government. For this evil trinity, Chiapas could be a pasture for cattle; a hacienda for exercising *droit de seigneur*, even with girls; a firing range against human targets and one of the laboratories for the PRI's most modern "democracy": here it wasn't necessary to know the candidates, not even their names or their proposals, or for knowing the election date, or what the options were, or any identification. Hell, it wasn't even necessary to go to the polls."²⁹

These imposing political structures emphasize the lack of change and unwillingness to grant Indigenous autonomy. Indigenous are left without any possibility of democratic say and live within a highly corruptive state that stands behind unconstitutional rulings. The sole purpose of their desire comes from attaining wealth through any means possible, producing the need to dominate over Indigenous people rather than the well-being of its people.

Mexican politicians, or the bad government as the Zapatista have defined them, favor Indigenous when political votes are needed for the win. Momentarily, Indigenous Mayans are manipulated with the promises of change but never instill such promises. Once their win is sealed, their words are long forgotten, and their promises disappear. A 2021 Enlace: "The Journey for Life: To What End?" Uncovers the extent of coloniality advanced through the civilization of greed and destruction of Indigenous land.

"Nunca mais" [Never again!] that are repeated in every corner of the planet will be promises and money, political programs and money, good intentions and money, flags and money, fanaticisms and money. There are the faithful who believe that the problems of the world can be reduced to a lack of money. And money requires roads, large-scale civilizing projects, hotels, malls, factories, banks, labor, consumers... police and armies. The so-called "rural communities" are classified as "underdeveloped" or "backwards" because the circulation of money, that is, of commodities, is nonexistent or very minimal. It's not important, for example, that their rate of femicide and gender-based violence are lower than in urban areas. Government achievements are measured by the number of

²⁹ Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, "3a. Reunión Preparatoria / Palabras De Inicio," Enlace Zapatista, June 17, 2015, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2005/08/20/palabras-de-inicio-reunion-dia-20-agosto/>.

neighborhoods destroyed and repopulated by producers and consumers of commodities, thanks to the reconstruction of that territory. Where before there was a milpa, natural spring or forest, now there are hotels, malls, factories, power plants... gender violence, persecution of difference, drug trafficking, infanticide, human trafficking, exploitation, racism and discrimination. In short: c-i-v-i-l-i-z-a-t-i-o-n.”³⁰ - Sup Galeano

The constant destruction of their environment and their rights to exist in their sacred places is behind the reason the Zapatistas fight. Political anthropologist Audra Simpson examines the paradox of two very distinct worlds that creates a significant issue of disposing of the other. Simpson explains, “the desire for land produces ‘the problem’ of the Indigenous life that is already living on that land. How, then, to manage that “Indian Problem....”³¹ For the settler-colonial desire for hegemonic control, the Indian problem still exists. There is a constant need to take control and remove Indigenous people from their territory to exploit the natural resources alongside using their labor to accumulate wealth. More importantly, it causes the removal of their self-autonomy, disempowering them by way of erasure and imprisoning them to the marginal ends of society.

Los De Abajo Reconstruimos (Those Below Reconstruct)

“Capitalism is a world economic system which has, since its birth, operated against human life and our mother earth. Its logic of accumulation and profit can only be reproduced through the ever-increasing exploitation of human labor and permanent dispossession of the land and territory of all of the peoples of the world, especially originary peoples.”³² - Sup Galeano, EZLN

Indigenous resistance against land dispossession is a global problem. Throughout the Americas, capitalism coercively claims the appropriation of land and continues to affect many

³⁰ SupGaleano, “The Journey for Life: To What End?,” Enlace Zapatista, July 21, 2021, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/07/20/the-journey-for-life-to-what-end/>.

³¹ Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, On: Duke University Press, 2014).

³² SupGaleano and Coordination and Monitoring Commission of the CNI-CIG, “Diversos Colectivos Invitan a La Acción Dislocada ‘a 500 Años Del Inicio De La Resistencia’ El Día 13 De Agosto De 2021, 11:00 Horas,” Enlace Zapatista, August 8, 2021, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/08/07/diversos-colectivos-invitan-a-la-accion-dislocada-a-500-anos-del-inicio-de-la-resistencia-el-dia-13-de-agosto-de-2021-1100-horas/>.

Indigenous communities. There is a constant resistance to removing Indigenous people from their territories worldwide. Such developments have given rise to LANDBACK movements that Native Americans in both the United States and Canada have organized to recover their stolen land and reclaim their sacred relationship with mother earth.³³ Land is deeply embedded in various aspects of Indigenous structures that envision land uniquely and comprehensively. This concept appreciates all life forms and is not limited by a particular ethnicity or species, integrating land and body as an interconnected part of one another. As they see it, humans and non-humans can only thrive through this reciprocal and symbiotic relationship that nurtures the complexity of their existence.

The development of capitalism has separated humans from recognizing the importance of nurturing and fostering sacred relationships with the land. It has disconnected humans from their basic instincts of surviving through life environments. This oppressive system distorts the significance of preserving our rich biodiversity, as pointed above, and the importance of fundamentally developing the relationship between humans and ecology. This detachment has dramatically impacted the way we tend to land and has divorced effective and essential connected relationships that maintain sustainable land management.

There are many differences between Indigenous people and their practices. Indigeneity differs through its politics and cultural complexities. However, Indigenous land is a central component of their spiritual, physical, social, and cultural connection to their identity. The United Nations has attempted to establish a universal framework that highlights the importance of Indigenous people as inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Noting differences in social, cultural, economic, and political approaches, the UN declaration of rights recognizes the need to respect and promote Indigenous

³³ The Land Back Campaign, "Landback," LANDBACK, 2021, <https://landback.org/>.

people's rights. Additionally, it acknowledges the need to allow Indigenous self-determination to choose their political, economic, and social structures that uphold cultural traditions and philosophies. Article 4 reaffirms Indigenous presence and encourages the need to see them as individuals free from discrimination and equal to all other humans and having “as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.”³⁴

Promoting social progress, human rights, and better living standards for Indigenous Africans, the United Nations attempted to highlight the importance of Indigenous communities' autonomy. The report on “Modes of Dispossession of Indigenous Lands and Territories in Africa” calls attention to the connection between the Indigenous population and Indigenous modes of environmental protection. Additionally, it recognizes the good stewardship of Indigenous to their land and the destruction of such when left up to international conservation interests that pressure governments to increase grants of land to be protected from human activities. It underlines the reality,

“that indigenous territories tend overwhelmingly to be havens of diverse flora and fauna, absent of deforestation, and rich in resources from timber and honey to minerals and rare species. Yet rather than be rewarded for protecting their territories while occupying them, they are frequently and increasingly evicted and persecuted due to prevailing insistence on “fortress conservation.”³⁵

The UN admits that the poor decisions in conservation of land allow for land to be converted into an uncorrupted wilderness absent from any human activity except tourism or trophy hunting for the privileged classes. This conservative practice ambiguously sidelines Indigenous land management efforts' ecological knowledge and care, where biodiversity

³⁴ United Nations General Assembly, “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for Indigenous Peoples,” United Nations (United Nations, 2017), <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>.

³⁵ Elifuraha I Laltaika and Kelly M. Askew, “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” United Nations, 2018,

maintains a stronghold and secures a more equitable solution. Additionally, the UN is ineffective in providing Indigenous people their fundamental rights and keeping environments from being commodified and damaged, primarily due to the lack of respect and non-binding legal obligation for nations to follow. Accordingly, Zapatistas demand the protection of their natural resources outside these intergovernmental structures.

A significant portion of the planet's natural resources is found where the world's Indigenous people inhabit. An estimated 400 million people³⁶ are vastly affected by this coercive removal. The southern part of Mexico retains the overall most extensive Indigenous population in Latin America, with an estimate of about 17 million.³⁷ Although Indigenous peoples are the majority in Southern parts of Mexico, the government instead protects the economic interest of the rich and powerful rather than providing for the well-being of Indigenous and Mixteca people. In 1981, a magazine promoting Indigenous voices named *Cultural Survival Quarterly* reported that 80 percent of the deforestation of the Selva Lacandona (Lacandon Jungle) was due to cattle pasture. In response to the international and national concerns, the Mexican government established the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve, which encircles 3,310 km² and 85 percent of which overlays the forest territory of the Lacandon Community. A Lacandon Maya leader exclaims, "They have turned all their forest to pasture, and now they want the forest we have kept alive for our families."³⁸ The Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve is a potential barrier against the continual destruction of land; however, the government's intention to take concern for natural

³⁶ "International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples," United Nations (United Nations, 2021), <https://www.un.org/en/observances/indigenous-day>.

³⁷ Maria Amparo Cruz-Saco and Joanne Toor Cummings, "Family Oriented Migration Policies and Social Integration - Un," United Nations, 2018, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2018/05/Family-Oriented-Migration-Policies-and-Social-Integration.pdf>.

³⁸ James D Nations, "The Ecology of the Zapatista Revolt," *Cultural Survival*, March 1, 1994, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/ecology-zapatista-revolt#sthash.PFnVTjRe.dpuf>.

resources is more of a strategy to manipulate the area. With minimal land used to work or live, the clandestine began to organize in the jungles of the Lacandon.

Aquí Estamos mi General Zapata! (We are here my General Zapata!)

"We are and want to be part of Mexico and not a stranger to the lands that gave birth to us. We are and want to be part of the great Mayan nation that many suns and moons ago saw these valleys flower. We are and want to take part in the construction of the nation we desire, where democracy, liberty, and justice exist. We only want to be equal to others, not more nor less, and to be respected as indigenous people."³⁹

Tired of living on their knees for 500 years and being excluded from the rest of Mexican society, they declared, *Ya Basta!* (Enough is Enough!). They protested and claimed they deserved the same human dignity as their Mexican companions. Subcomandante shares a letter written to the deceased Emiliano Zapata. Zapata is Mexico's revolutionary hero who strongly opposed the *hacienda* system during the Porfiriato years. Still fighting the same struggle from 1914, the Zapatistas assert their presence to resist, "Here we are, my General, here we continue."⁴⁰ His famous quote, "Prefiero morir de pie que vivir de rodillas" (I would rather die on my feet than live on my knees), is still more relevant than ever for the Zapatistas. They continue fighting for communal land policies under Article 27 that Zapata himself fought and died for. After the agrarian land reform of 1917, communal land gave Mayan Indigenous territory to farm, known as *ejidos* communally. The reforming of Article 27 was written to replace communal land in the hands of private owners. The Mexican PRI president Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) carved

³⁹ Mariana Mora, "The EZLN and Indigenous Autonomous Municipalities," School for Chiapas, April 1998, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Mariana-Mora-Indigenous-Autonomous-Municipalities.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Insurgent Subcommander Marcos, "A Emiliano Zapata: Aquí Estamos Mi General, Aquí SEGUIMOS.," Enlace Zapatista, January 17, 2015, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1997/04/10/a-emiliano-zapata-aqui-estamos-mi-general-aqui-seguimos/>.

out the possibility for the successor and the Harvard-educated Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) to format Article 27 to the rulings of NAFTA.⁴¹ Article 27 permitted,

“The property of all land and water within national territory is originally owned by the Nation, who has the right to transfer this ownership to particulars. Hence, private property is a privilege created by the Nation. Expropriation is authorized only where appropriate in the public interest and subject to payment of compensation.”⁴²

NAFTA exacerbated what little they had. Before NAFTA, *ejido* land could not be sold or taken by a bank for default on loan. *Ejido* land was communally owned.⁴³ Under the new neoliberal policies, Indigenous communal lands were available and up for sale to private investors with no say in Indigenous votes. Their agricultural productivity, food security, and income became obsolete in ways to survive and yet another attack on their way of life.

Join the Insurgent Forces of the Zapatista National Liberation Army

“We, the men and women, full and free, are conscious that the war that we have declared is our last resort, but also a just one. The dictators are applying an undeclared genocidal war against our people for many years. Therefore we ask for your participation, your decision to support this plan that struggles for work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace. We declare that we will not stop fighting until the basic demands of our people have been met by forming a government of our country that is free and Democratic.”⁴⁴ - General Command of the EZLN

The 1994 Zapatista *First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* urged the Mexican people to join the fight for life. After 12 days and hearing the plea of the Mexican civilians to stop the warfare, the EZLN entered into a peace agreement with the Mexican government. However, the

⁴¹ Gavin O'Toole, “A Constitution Corrupted,” NACLA, March 8, 2017, <https://nacla.org/news/2017/03/08/constitution-corrupted>.

⁴² “Mexico 1917 (Rev. 2015) Constitution,” Constitute, April 2022, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mexico_2015?lang=en.

⁴³ Mary Ann Tenuto, “Chiapas: The Reconquest of Recuperated Land,” April 28, 2010, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/chiapas-the-reconquest-of-recuperated-land.pdf>.

⁴⁴ General Command of the EZLN, “First Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle - Schools for Chiapas,” First Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle, 1996, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/1st-Declaration-of-the-Lacandona-Jungle.pdf>.

government's deceitfulness had no real intention of hearing and amending the political constitution to dignify their lives. The Constitution application of Article 39 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States: National Sovereignty acknowledges the political power to rest on its people and grant civilians the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government.⁴⁵ In the initial declaration of their uprising, the Zapatistas demanded the Mexican capital to appoint their Indigenous administrative authorities, a judgment account of all political and federal army traitors that have betrayed the laws of the Mexican country, and suspend the robbery of natural resources. However, the government stalled for time and denounced the Zapatistas' human rights.

In another attempt to create equitable structures in February of 1996, the Zapatistas brought together a national perspective as an approach to give Mexican civilians equal opportunity to participate. More than 100 national community leaders participated in trying to resolve the issue of agrarian inequality during the San Andres peace talks. The Zapatistas' reformation,

“... should recover the spirit of the struggle of Emiliano Zapata summarized in two basic demands: the land should be owned by those who work on it, land and liberty. This reform should contain the recommendations elaborated by our delegation throughout the second phase of the negotiations. It should guarantee territorial integrity to indigenous peoples, based on the understanding that territory is constituted by the totality of the lands in which they reside. There should be integrity of communal and ejidal land.”⁴⁶

- Zapatista Army of National Liberation

The Dialogue of San Andres and the Rights of Indigenous Culture advocated moving away from individualist land ownership to a more collective and communal formation. However, the talk lacked success as the Mexican government failed to present such accords to its congress. The

⁴⁵ “Mexico 1917 (Rev. 2015) Constitution,” Constitute, April 2022, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mexico_2015?lang=en.

⁴⁶ Zapatista Army of National Liberation, “Indigenous Rights and San Andres - Schools for Chiapas,” Schools for Chiapas, 2014, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Indigenous-rights-and-San-Andres.pdf>.

EZLN rebels retreated and found strength in unity, working towards obtaining liberty and defeating the capitalist monster in one day. As a form of resistance, the Zapatistas cover their faces to identify those within the struggle.

Autonomy & Honoring the Land (Mother Earth) as a collective

During a regional women's gathering in Morelia, the Zapatista women explained, "We joined the EZLN because we didn't have land... Since we didn't have our own land, we had to do whatever the patrón told us. We saw how our people were suffering."⁴⁷ Achieving autonomy is inherently linked to obtaining back their territory and being able to practice political, social, and cultural decisions, and gaining the respect of their people. Autonomy for the Zapatistas "...remains as the right to organize and govern ourselves by our ways of knowing, by our language, culture, religion, politics, economy, resources, and territory."⁴⁸ The SC further explains, "it is the respect they obtain when being able to exercise their traditions and customs (*usos y costumbres*) in their community and using their power accordingly to abide by these structures that are non-monetary but rather are on the wellbeing of their land and societies."⁴⁹

Autonomy requires more than placing Indigenous racial representation in positions of Western power structures. It meets only one aspect in unraveling 500 years of land dispossession but does not ensure the good interest of all community members. Zapatistas' autonomy requires a union of multiple interconnected issues, such as-a fulfilling position that will assure the democracy of the collective, redistribute land equally, assure just prices for crops in an open and international market, and supportive housing, health, education, and transparent communication.⁵⁰ In this way, Zapatista communities are a correlation of various social

⁴⁷ Hilary Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories* (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2015), pg 755.

⁴⁸ School for Chiapas, "What Is Zapatista Autonomy?," Schools for Chiapas, October 28, 2015, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/blog-entry-zapatista-autonomy/>.

⁴⁹ *Ibd*

⁵⁰ June Nash, "The Power of the Powerless: Update from Chiapas," *Cultural Survival*, March 1, 1995, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/power-powerless-update-chiapas>.

structures that center on cooperative projects that look out for one another. Mora refers to Indigenous life existence as *Kuxlejal* politics. She explains,

“*Kuxlejal* as a term is but a mere point of anchor granted meaning when used as part of the term for the concept of expressing living as a collective, *stalel jkuxlejaltik*, a way of being in the world as a people, and as part of the term for a daily aspiration to live in a dignified manner, *lekil kuxlejal*. The horizon of struggle for *lekil kuxlejal*, with its Tojolabal equivalent, *sak’aniltik*, as a good way of living refers not only to an individual being but to that being in relation to a communal connection to the earth, to the natural and supernatural world that envelops as well as nurtures social beings and is thus constantly honored. Without land, without the ability to plant and harvest sufficient food, without the constant remembering of ancestors in connection to the future and as part of revering the earth, the elements that provide sustenance meaning to life dissipate.”⁵¹

The making of all these collective expressions and beings equates to living life with dignity with good relations to its land. She interprets this manner of living as fundamentally political and anticolonial and the act of engaging in such policy as inseparable from the act of living.

The care of the land is a responsibility that requires collective participation and knowledge. Its cohesiveness permits them to take on the enormous role of caring for and maintaining the well-being of their land. Integrating their traditional ways, the Mayan Chiapanecos held a great deal of de facto autonomy derived from their customs (*usos y costumbres*) and living according to this idea of self-governance. The Zapatistas emphasize the importance of their autonomy as a significant component of their right to govern themselves because it provides the physical basis for community making. Historian Collier wrote, “There is an ideal behind their “autonomy”: the prerogative for people everywhere to govern themselves locally and regionally, to control the resources essential for their livelihoods, and to enjoy culturally plural social rights- the ‘world of many worlds’.”⁵²

⁵¹ Mariana Mora, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 2017), pg 19.

⁵² George Allen Collier and Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello, *Basta!: Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2005), pg 194.

Zapatista Principles- Them & Us, The Smallest of them All

After several failed attempts by the Mexican government to adhere to its constitutional law, the EZLN recognized that it was insufficient to address the exploitation of their people and reform the Mexican system. Distinctly, its limitations to abide by structural adjustment policies kept the government trapped in the economic race of modernization. The development of the Mexican structures became impotent to act independently from the global north's will. The EZLN realized it would have to take its revolt to new extents and build its communal living through efforts of its own.

Discredited and afraid of the EZLN's expanding influence, Mexico renewed its commitment to Chiapas social resource programs that were lost due to pressures of refinancing their debt during the International debt crisis.⁵³ Some of the Indigenous non-Zapatistas who felt powerless and in fear of the tyranny of Mexican politics were lured by these government assistance welfare programs that provided minimal security. Their decision to accept such dependent assistance came with costly losses that restricted their lives. Those accepting government aid were required to be engaged in risky businesses that ultimately ventured to obtain resources and wealth. Indigenous people who surrender to the materialist world continue to reorient themselves and seek ways to compensate for their emotional distress. Subcomandante Marcos clarifies that "over the years we have gotten stronger, and we have significantly improved our living conditions. Our standard of living is higher than those of indigenous communities who receive handouts from the government and waste them on alcohol and other

⁵³ Ibid, pg 96.

useless things." ⁵⁴ Using substances to suppress their shame is evident in their discontent and poor living conditions.

The EZLN *Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* reiterated the dishonesty and hypocrisy of the Mexican government to obey civil liberty. Time after time, the political parties let their people down, fooling them with the rhetoric of democracy.

“ We understand that the ascendancy of the political party that has been in power for so long cannot be allowed to continue. We understand that this party, a party that has kept the fruits of every Mexican's labor for itself, cannot be allowed to continue. We understand that the corruption of the presidential elections that sustains this party impedes our freedom and should not be allowed to continue. We understand that the culture of fraud is the method with which this party imposes and impedes democracy. We understand that justice only exists for the corrupt and powerful. We understand that we must construct a society in which those who lead do so with the will of the people. There is no other path.”⁵⁵
 - General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army

Allowing the people of Mexico to dictate their next move, the EZLN asked for the participation of its people to join a *National Democratic Convention* (NDC) where together they could bring about a provisional or transitional government. The NDC was held on August 5th to produce dialogue and listen to people's needs, emerging with proposed solutions based on their form of solutions and adhering to their principle of *Mandar con Obedecer* (To obey and not to command). Six thousand people attended the dialogue dedicated to showing the Mexican people an Indigenous social base, reflecting on the fairness of their demands and the dignity that motivated the struggle. ⁵⁶

Junta de Buen Gobierno (Good Governance Board): Indigenous Democratic Governance

⁵⁴ Raul Zibechi, “Freedom According to the Zapatistas - Schools for Chiapas,” *The Art of Building a New World: Freedom According to the Zapatistas*, 2013, <https://www.schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Freedom-According-to-the-Zapatistas.pdf>.

⁵⁵ General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, “Second Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle,” *Schools for Chiapas*, April 1, 2014, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/declaration-lacandon-jungle-2/>.

⁵⁶ School for Chiapas, “Zapatista Timeline,” *Schools for Chiapas*, April 12, 2021, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/teach-chiapas/zapatista-timeline/>.

After almost a decade of negotiating with the Mexican government, in 2003, they decided to create autonomous communities that fostered the fundamental right of autonomy and self-determination. The *Junta de Buen Gobierno (JBG)* was created that centered on the concept of Zapatismo. They began with five main bases (recently increased) and utilized the *Indigenous Clandestine Committee – General Command (CCRI)* to help watch over and support the JBG. The 5 autonomous regions, Roberto Barrios, Morelia, La Garrucha, La Realidad, and Oventik are known as *Caracoles* (snails). These zones communicate back and forth between the municipality and the community level.

The Zapatista principles guide their horizontal governing community that functions for the people's wellbeing and not to gain power over them. By obeying and following their principles they earned the respect of their community members that values a democratic say. The JBG houses seven principles that shortly convey their purpose are:

- 1- *Mandar Obedeciendo (Lead by Obeying)*
- 2- *Proponer y No Imponer (Propose and Not to Impose)*
- 3- *Representar y No Suplantar (Represent, Don't Replace)*
- 4- *Anti-poder, Contra Poder (Anti-power, Against Power/Work from Below, Not Seek to Rise)*
- 5- *Convencer y No Vencer (Convince and Not to Conquer)*
- 6- *Todo Para Todos, Nada Para Nosotros (Everything for Everyone Nothing for Ourselves)*
- 7- *Construir y No Destruir (Construct and Not Destroy)*

In practice, their first and critical principle of *Mandar Obedeciendo* challenges authoritarianism that concentrates power in the hands of the elite and places it within the communities. Leading by example, the EZLN encourages the local communities' involvement and follows through with the communities' proposed solutions. Ideas are heard through day-long meetings where everyone has a chance to be heard, and a decision is met once a compromise is reached, *Convincing members and not Defeating them*.⁵⁷ They incorporate assigned rotating

⁵⁷ Anna Rebrii, "Zapatistas: Lessons in Community Self-Organisation in Mexico," openDemocracy, June 25, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/zapatistas-lecciones-de-auto-organizaci%C3%B3n-comunitaria-en/>.

leaders' name cargos, an Indigenous traditions custom to represent their communities' concerns.⁵⁸ In this sense, people both *Propose* solutions rather than having the government *Impose* laws that fall short of finding actual answers and are always *Represented and never Replaced* with members who favor special interests. Cargos are voluntary and non compensated positions that support the communities' obligations and responsibilities collectively in the *Anti Power* model that encompasses *Everything for Everyone, Nothing for Ourselves*. They implement decisions based on local assemblies, a traditional decision-making method. Assemblies elect delegates to a municipal council named *Municipios Aut6nomos Rebeldes Zapatistas (MAREZ)- Zapatista Rebel Municipalities* are then present at the regional level and where delegates represent the autonomous municipalities in JBG. The JBG is made up of 12 people who come from diverse ethnic Mayan communities. JBG members can serve up to 3 years or as short as a few weeks. The frequent rotation discourages the emergence of clientelistic networks.⁵⁹ In the final six months end of a representative's term, they are responsible for advising the new coming delegate.

Additionally, various communities enact a supervisory committee that oversees that power is not abused and mandates a certain number of seats to be allocated to women, whose participation is essential to creating equity and social change in their communities.⁶⁰ Creating a better world where many worlds fit also requires the act of *Constructing and not Destroying*. In this way, Zapatistas have proposed campaigns for international solidarity that emphasize mutual

⁵⁸ Mariana Mora, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 2017), pg 39.

⁵⁹ Anna Rebrii, "Zapatistas: Lessons in Community Self-Organisation in Mexico," openDemocracy, June 25, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/zapatistas-lecciones-de-auto-organizaci%C3%B3n-comunitaria-en/>.

⁶⁰ datacenter.org, "Zapatista Principles & Practices - Datacenter," datacenter.org, accessed May 20, 2022, <http://www.datacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/ZapatistaPrinciples.pdf>.

aid and the exchange of viable ideas.⁶¹ A member of the Board of Good Government at Oventic Caracol spoke about how the autonomous body functions.

“We are giving service to our people, we know what we have said from the 94, (...) we do have to change a situation that is of the people (...) we see what needs there are here (...) is our obligation to receive national and international visitors and it is our obligation to see the fulfillment of the needs of every people of every village.”⁶²

- Good Government Oventic, 2011, interview

By exercising autonomous control over their communities, the civilians consist of the highest decision-making level. Zapatistas proposed projects that assure equitable distribution between and among their collective communities. They actively participated in the economics that governed their lives by way of political representation. Collective and cooperatives work together to reach economic self-sufficiency that distributes resources equitably. Cooperative and land collectives fund collective projects such as schools and clinics. Women begin to participate in women collectives that encourage them to participate and provide an opportunity to gain confidence. Overall their practice recreates a different way of leading and building power within the community. The Zapatista community members are proud to be themselves, live freely with dignity, and honor their land.

Modern Nation-State and the making of Identity

Indigenous traditions are exceptional and contradictory to Western hegemony's means of controlling its surroundings. Disintegrating such ideas of collective existence became indispensable for colonial powers and the making of nation-states. Reconstructing the Indigenous identity based on this disparaging image became crucial in establishing control. As more and more Spanish arrived, adopting a more obvious hierarchical order ensured their superiority and

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⁶² Gallo Téenek, “Indigenous Farming and Food - Schools for Chiapas,” School for Chiapas, 2014, <https://www.schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Indigenous-farming-and-food.pdf>.

manipulation over non-Europeans, including the discriminatory treatment towards European women and, to a notable degree, towards Indigenous women. It clearly defined those in power, separating and marginalizing those who could be exploited. The idea of race and the rules of a new structure of control of labor, resources, and products commence the model of the identity of this new society. Quijano has pointed to these as two axes of historical processes that were fundamental to the new power model.⁶³ These central components enslaved Indigenous and African, exploited their labor, and dehumanized their existence.

Making the modern nation-state in Mexico was impossible without the recreation of its new identity. Maldonado-Torres explains that the process of colonization and the making of its state rests on the lives of those written as barbarians. Notably, he argues that the conditions they endured marked their new identity. He writes,

“But the true context was marked not only by the existence of the barbarian, or else, the barbarian had acquired new connotations in modernity. The barbarian was a racialized self, and what characterized this racialization was a radical questioning or permanent suspicion regarding the humanity of the self in question.”⁶⁴

This racialization restructured non-European self-identity. Under colonial suppression, the Indigenous people became inadequate to measure up to European standards and were destined to labor away their years on earth. Indigenous bodies were constantly pushed to the brink of hell as they extracted labor or resources from their territory. Characterizing the Indigenous as wild children asserted the paternalistic leadership of Europeans and their God-given right as Christian saviors. The use of Christianity reinforced the lack of self-control of Indigenous socio-culture and penetrated their identity. Under those circumstances, Indigenous

⁶³ Quijano, Anibal. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533-580. muse.jhu.edu/article/23906. pg 533.

⁶⁴ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): pp. 240-270, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548>, pg 245.

were forced to distance themselves from their collective culture as they searched for their soul savior. Martiniquan revolutionary Franz Fanon highlights the implantation of the Christian religion as a source that impales their culture and identity legitimacy as people. He explains that it is a stark form of dehumanizing Indigenous people away from their ways of being. Fanon says,

“But the triumphant communiques from the missions are in fact a source of information concerning the implantation of foreign influences in the core of the colonized people. I speak of the Christian religion, and no one need be astonished. The Church in the colonies is the white people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the native to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor. And as we know, in this matter many are called but few chosen. At times this Manicheism goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal”⁶⁵

A majority of Indigenous in the central highland of Chiapas currently follow a syncretism that merges traditional Indigenous customs with Catholicism. While there are many diverse religions- Protestant, Evangelical, Mormon, Seventh-Day Adventist, and others that are nontraditional for Mexico, they are all Christian-based, reflecting the present impact of foreign influence that exists and impacts their consciousness. Maldonado-Torres contributes,

“the very relationship between colonizer and colonized [and] provided a new model to understand the relationship between the soul or mind and the body; and likewise, modern articulation of the mind/body are used as models to conceive the colonizer/colonized relation, as well as the relation between man and woman, particularly the woman of color.”⁶⁶

Maldonado-Torres argues that the emergence of what Quijano refers to as the coloniality of power came about when colonizers discussed the idea of whether or not Indians possess souls. This, he explains, led to the Valladolid debate between Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and Bartolomé De Las Casas, in which Sepúlveda claimed a just war against the inferior Indigenous souls who

⁶⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2021), pg 246.

⁶⁶ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): pp. 240-270, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548>, pg 246.

rejected their Christian religion and culture. Maldonado-Torres says such rejection gave rise to Indigenous dehumanization and a new ethical standard for managing such contention.

Modernity has condemned traditional Indigenous ways of viewing and belonging to their land as antiquated forms. Centuries long have tragically stripped Indigenous people from acknowledging their legitimacy and convincing them to distrust their self-reliance as land caretakers. Tuck and Yang argue that Indigenous culture and knowledge are the biggest threat to the Western capitalist-driven society that divorces humanity from land and life. Replacing Indigenous as historical passages and rebranding (commodifying) their new environments into mere objects of trade. They explain:

“... the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage”⁶⁷

Because of its stark contrast to dominant colonial culture, Indigenous like the Mexican Mayans continue to suffer centuries after colonial presence. The remnants of colonialism live on in the idea of modernizing the state and the perception of the individual dictated by European progress and its yearning to become a hegemonic cultural identity of progressiveness.

This opposition has affected many aspects of Indigenous life. It forced many to transform themselves into something different from themselves. The pressure to assimilate to European norms across Latin America and in mestizo communities like my own reject any linked to Indigenous heritage. Although the rise of the mestizo population is a mixture of both ethnicities, most mestizo distance themselves from their connection to Indigenous origins, likely in fear of seeming outdated and irrelevant. Mestizos are known to disregard and deny any Indigenous

⁶⁷ Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, “Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): pp. 1-40, <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630/15554>.

characteristics and rather incline themselves to the European identities that have dominated society. Those that decide to acknowledge their Indigenous roots are often ridiculed. Ultimately, many fight against the idea of having any Indigenous ancestry. The mestizo population has come up with references but never dives deeper into analyzing such sayings and connections. Such sayings as ‘*con el nopal en la frente,*’ which roughly translates to bearing a cactus on their forehead, refer to the typical proverbs; cacti are native and synonymous with Mexico’s historical and Indigenous culture. However, they are used in some cases to shame those who have more prominent traits of Indigenous mestizo heritage. Many use these terms as an insult to refer to Mexicans with darker complexions that deny any Indigenous inheritance and as an invalid attempt to detach from their Indigenous origins and conform to European standards of society.

The erasure of Indigenous culture in Mexican society was foundational to imagining a ‘new’ Mexico. It was suitable to destroy old ways of knowing and replace them with new political structures that endorse the achievement of Western progress. Mexico has falsely created the Indigenous as past artifacts that cohabit in museums or as commodities that lure tourists to the attraction of gazing into history. Conjointly, media representations strengthen such misconceptions and are primarily typecast as very primitive and uncivilized reflections, making them incompatible with the Western perception of modernity. Hidden in exotic corners of the world, they become incomparable to living in the modern world. As a result, indigenous communities are invisible and highly misrepresented to most of the world.

In 2001, as a final attempt to convince the Mexican federal government to approve the *Cocopa* (*Congressional Commission for Agreement and Peace*) bill, the EZLN organized *The Color of the Earth* tour and marched towards the central plaza in Mexico City. The *Cocopa* bill recognized Indigenous communities as subjects of public rights and acknowledged them as part

of the state.⁶⁸ Mora described the congressional chamber as half-filled with senators and representatives and with very little interest in hearing the Zapatista. Mora indicated that the questions asked during the hearing demonstrated the little knowledge of Indigenous demands for recognition. Such pertaining questions were, “Does self-determination mean that autonomy for the indigenous peoples will cause them to split the country and establish a new state? “Do indigenous rights harm human rights?” “Do traditional customs harm the rights of indigenous women?”

In one of the most remembered speeches of *The Color of the Earth tour*, Zapatista Esther proposed decolonization in the every day that allowed for the recognition of gender equality with the demands of political and economic restructuring.

“...for us, the indigenous women of Mexico. It will enable us to be recognized and respected as the women and indigenous people that we are. By this we mean that we want our ways of dressing, speaking, governing, organizing, praying, and healing to be recognized, together with our manner of working in collectives, of respecting the earth and understanding life, which is the nature we are all part of. This law takes into account our rights as women and means that no one can prevent us from participating or deny the dignity and integrity of our work, in equality with men.”⁶⁹ - Comandante Esther

Months later in that year, Congress unanimously approved a cut-up law that took the place of the Cocopa bill. Its placement made little difference in alleviating their impoverished state and how the Indigenous men and women were recognized. Furthermore, it illustrated Indigenous people's customs as outliers to modernity and failed to "juridically transform Indigenous people's relationship to the state.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Jorge Alonso and Envio, “The Indigenous Law: A Mocking Step Backwards - Schoolsforchiapas.org,” School for Chiapas, 2001, <https://www.schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/The-Indigenous-Law-A-Mocking-Step-Backwards.pdf>.

⁶⁹ Mariana Mora, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 2017), pg 37.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pg 37.

What is Freedom? True Education, Health, & Justice

“The Zapatista project of autonomy is more than a political and economic proposal for local, municipal and regional self-governance. It constitutes a broad-based social and cultural initiative, of which education is a core element. As a socializing space, the school reproduces culture, practices and discourses; but it can also generate change and resistance, not only in the form of education, but in the subjects themselves, in their forms of community organization and their family relationships.”⁷¹

True Education

In the Zapatista communities, their use of education is a focal point in transforming their collective culture. Education promoters (adult community members) administer the autonomous school and are under the supervision of an education committee who are chosen by their local assembly. They consult the local community and other solidarity groups, volunteers, and NGOs to carry out training programs and develop a well-intended school curriculum. Like other leadership positions, education promoters do not receive salaries and are helped by the community to farm their family cornfields.⁷²

Education promoters are reinventing the teacher-student relationship that has been tarnished by incorporating Mayan roots and languages. Classes are taught in the community’s native language to preserve their traditions and knowledge and conjointly learn Spanish. In this manner, they promote the connection between origins and self-identity.

The use of traditional knowledge is passed down through generations of storytelling. Women have a unique role in passing down traditions like their native

⁷¹ Angélica Rico, “Educate in Resistance: The Autonomous Zapatista Schools,” School for Chiapas, 2014, https://abahlali.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Educate-in-resistance_-the-autonomous-Zapatista-schools-1.pdf.

⁷² Anna Rebrii, “Zapatistas: Lessons in Community Self-Organisation in Mexico,” openDemocracy, June 25, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/zapatistas-lecciones-de-auto-organizaci%C3%B3n-comunitaria-en/>.

customs and vitally important language to their children. Many of the women in Chiapas were monolingual until the organization of the movement. Women meaningfully transferred such traditional languages to their children and conjointly built their sense of community with the relationship to their land.

“...Zapatista schools the identity of Indigenous peoples is encouraged and classes are given in Spanish, Zoque, Tzeltal and Chol and [the curriculum] speaks of the Zapatista struggle and history. The stories of the autonomous learning of children are about their own people and struggles. The challenge in education is now to correlate all projects. Classes in health and agroecology are wanted by and offered in the communities.”⁷³

Students learn about the Zapatista central values of education, land, work, housing, food, healthcare, culture, independence, information, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace. Educating the Zapatista allows them to one day take on significant roles of leadership within education, health, ecological agriculture, collective projects, and importantly participate in the good governance board. As one of the education promoters highlights,

“Our education is about having a dignified struggle and one heart, so that we can walk together in the same direction. We believe that education is not only about teaching literacy and numeracy, but also about solving problems between our peoples, how to defend ourselves, about our history and how to keep on fighting.”⁷⁴ - Hortencia, Tzeltal promoter of True Education

Healthcare

Healthcare is vital to improve the quality of life. This is why Zapatista health promoters organized regional health centers that are typically housed in almost all Zapatista communities. They are local volunteers that receive training in both traditional and modern medicine. Advanced treatment is located in municipal centers such as the

⁷³ Gallo Téenek, “Indigenous Farming and Food - Schools for Chiapas,” School for Chiapas, 2014, <https://www.schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Indigenous-farming-and-food.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Angélica Rico, “Educate in Resistance: The Autonomous Zapatista Schools,” School for Chiapas, 2014, https://abahlali.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Educate-in-resistance_-the-autonomous-Zapatista-schools-1.pdf.

clinic in Oventic that performs primary surgery, dental, gynecological, and eye procedures, as well as a host laboratory, herbal workshops, and ambulances. A health coordinating committee at each administrative level ensures participation and provides the proper care to their autonomous community. Additionally, they also serve areas with a mix of Zapatista and non-Zapatistas.⁷⁵ This is a narrative from a 2011 Good Governance Oventic interview.

“Autonomous regions are [working to extend a network] of nursing homes and clinics, dental offices, clinical and herbology [ethnobotany] laboratories, and centers for practiced ophthalmology and gynecology as well as pharmacies. In the community health system of the Zapatistas, the queries have a nominal fee and are sometimes free and serve anyone who requests [medical attention] whether or not the [person is part of the] EZLN support base. Traditional medicine is free while [provision of] pharmaceutical medicine [is provided at] cost. (Zibeche, 2008: 43)”⁷⁶

Justice

The ineffective police and justice system of Mexico fails many citizens and has allowed for the flourishing of organized crime. In contrast, the Zapatista justice system has been a dependable and favorable method of achieving justice in the Chiapas communities. Four main advantages lured the natives to this form of justice. It is conducive to Indigenous languages, free of charge, known to be unbiased, and emphasizes finding a compromise between parties through restorative justice. Cases are chosen by either authorities or communal assemblies and are based on three levels of seriousness and type of incident. *The Women’s Commission* addresses domestic issues or women-related issues. Authorities’ are unpaid, unarmed, ununiformed, and are not permanent and elected by the community. Sentences are typically given in the form of

⁷⁵ Anna Rebrii, “Zapatistas: Lessons in Community Self-Organisation in Mexico,” openDemocracy, June 25, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/zapatistas-lecciones-de-auto-organizaci%C3%B3n-comunitaria-en/>.

⁷⁶ Gallo Téenek, “Indigenous Faming and Food - Schools for Chiapas,” School for Chiapas, 2014, <https://www.schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Indigenous-faming-and-food.pdf>, pg 4.

community service, fines, or jail time. Jail time typically does not exceed more than a couple of days. Severe cases could serve alternative sentences such as jail and community service. The guilty party will work for the family that endured the harm and the guilty party's family. At the highest level, JBG steps in when non-Zapatista or other political organizations dispute land. Alternatively, JBG also settles disputes over Zapatista members not obeying rules, such as being under the influence of alcohol or any drug substance. Alternatively, they also get involved when government officials receive unjust treatment; in some instances, Zapatista may choose to accompany claimants to argue on their part.⁷⁷

The Intersection between Gender & Racial Hierarchy of Mayan Indigenous Women

“For women in the Lower and Basement Mexico everything is doubled, (except for respect): referring to women the percentages of illiteracy, of subhuman living conditions, low salaries, of margination, are incremented into a nightmare that the system prefers to ignore or disguise within general indexes that do not show the exploitation of the gender that makes general exploitation possible. But something is beginning not to fit in this double submission, the double nightmare doubles the awakening.”⁷⁸ - Subcomandante Marcos, EZLN

Subcomandante Marcos calls to attention the abuses endured by Mexican women in the lowest social ranks of rural Mexico. The basement, as his analogy, refers to hides out of sight, constantly overlooked and unrecognized to most. There is a triple bind the EZLN Comandata Ester expresses, “We are oppressed three times over, because we are poor, because we are indigenous, and because we are women.”⁷⁹ Kimberlé Crenshaw has termed this as intersectionality, which is the overlapping intersection of multiple identities such as race, class, and gender that are discriminated against but are isolated from each other to invisibilize its

⁷⁷ Anna Rebrii, “Zapatistas: Lessons in Community Self-Organisation in Mexico,” openDemocracy, June 25, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/zapatistas-lecciones-de-auto-organizaci%C3%B3n-comunitaria-en/>.

⁷⁸ Subcomandante Marcos, “The Long Journey from Despair to Hope,” Marcos - The long journey from despair to hope, September 22, 1994, http://struggle.ws/mexico/ezln/marcos_journey_se94.html.

⁷⁹ Hilary Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories* (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2015). p136.

accumulated negative impacts and silence their social injustice.⁸⁰ In Crenshaw's argument, she utilizes the interpretation of intersectionality with the deficiency of the law to interpret the discrimination against Black women. She objects to (dominant) political systems concerning itself to find solutions to racism and sexism from the top-down instead of those at the bottom who are most disadvantaged from their discriminatory practice.⁸¹

The intersection of the identity of many Indigenous women hides behind one or two representations of Indigenous ethnicity that condemn them to their class struggle; however, it obscures the gender discrimination within their social class. It makes it harder for Indigenous men and the rest of society to see the oppressive multitude and recognize the multi-layers of struggle. Ecuadorian journalist and scholar Manuela Lavinás Picq argues that Indigenous women have historically endured more oppression than men because of their social position in Indigenous and western society. Inside their communities, they are prey to sexist violence, and outside their communities, they face racism "since women are 'more Indian.'" Being 'more Indian' implies the absence of opportunity from their limited education and lack of speaking Spanish. The Indigenous women are criticized as "Maria," a comedic character developed in Mexico that depicts a racial and stereotypical representation of Indigenous women. Lavinás Picq exemplifies this when ProFujimorista Martha Hildebrant discredits Indigenous women Humalista congressperson Hilaria Supa, a Quechua woman appointed to Peru's Commission on Education in Congress. Hildebrant denounces Supa as someone with "such a low intellectual and academic level" and defends against anti-racist accusations as she mentions, "It's not that she is Indian, if she was an Indian graduated from Oxford I would not oppose it (El Comercio 2010)."

⁸⁰ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 89, no. 1 (1989): pp. 139-167, <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>.

⁸¹ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 89, no. 1 (1989): pp. 139-167, <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>, pg. 167.

In contrast, Hildebrant argues that the label of Indian is removed from Peruvian president Alejandro Toledo, who has a Ph.D. from Stanford University and is defined as a specialist in the economics of education.⁸²

Additionally, Lugones argues that coloniality positions women in subordinate roles because of the social relationships manifested through colonial power structures. She argued that these intersections “created different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers. Thus, it introduced many genders and gender itself as a colonial concept and mode of organization of relations of production, property relations, of cosmologies and ways of knowing.”⁸³ Lugones questions how these intersections bind non-European men to violate and oppress non-European women regardless of the discrimination they suffer and feel indifferent to the injustices faced by women of color.

Genderless

Under the enslavement condition, historic Mayan territory was dispossessed in the name of the Christian church. The colonial discourse of gender roles has reduced Indigenous women to animal-like figures by distinguishing them from European women’s subordinate status. Lugones describes this process as an altering and redefining of Indigenous women.

“They were also understood to be animals in a sense that went further than the identification of white women with nature, infants, and small animals. They were understood as animals in the deep sense of “without gender,” sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity. Women racialized as inferior were turned from animals into various modified versions of “women” as it fit the processes of Eurocentered global capitalism.”⁸⁴

⁸² Manuela Lavinás Picq, *Vernacular Sovereignities: Indigenous Women Challenging World Politics* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2019), pg 49.

⁸³ María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): pp. 186-209, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2007.tb01156.x>.

⁸⁴ María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): pp. 186-209, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2007.tb01156.x>, pg 13.

Turning Indigenous women into genderless animals facilitated the different control and power compared to European women. These norms allow them to be convinced of their inferior treatment and suffer barbaric abuses from European society. Lugones claimed that the mistreatment of Indian women and African slave women existed side by side with concubinage befitting Euro-centered, global capitalism and heterosexual domination of white women.⁸⁵ Many Indigenous women of the EZLN presently recount stories of rape and abuse under the hands of *finqueros*. Author Hilary Klein who lived and worked along with the Zapatistas compiled a book of testimonies about the abusive faith of Indigenous women of Chiapas before joining the EZLN. The Indigenous women tell of how some of their daughters were sexually abused by the patrón and how connivingly the patrón would ask the young girls to make tortillas. One day, said the Zapatista, the patrón, bluntly asked all the Indigenous men to bring their daughters so he could rape them. Those that countered his demand end up hung by a tree. Klein also explains, “The widespread rape of indigenous women by colonial landowner was one source for the emergency of mestizo people of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage, who make up the majority of the Mexican population today.”⁸⁶

In Mexico, the well-known abuses travel through the connected communities producing the constant fear of retaliation against the *finqueros* in power. Furthermore, the political parties that allow the failure of the state’s judicial system by way of corrupt governments that fund clientelism and lack to identify or report such abuses by most non-Indigenous Mexicans. This produces a constant denial and invalidation of their collective self-determination.

The 1995 *Fourth World Conference on Women in Peking*, sanctioned by the UN's 189 member states, proposed an action plan to design women’s equality worldwide; it first took place

⁸⁵ Lugones, p. 13

⁸⁶ Klein, p. 416

in Mexico in 1975.⁸⁷ The objectives for the advancement of women in 12 different areas ranging from education, health, violence against women, media, and the environment. In similar accounts, the United Nations' 1982 *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*⁸⁸ (CEDAW) brought 23 experts on women's issues around the globe. Committee made recommendations on any issues affecting women and recommended that state parties devote more attention to the specifics of such issues. General recommendation No. 34 on Rights of Rural Women states that rural women's right to free, prior, & informed consent before development projects are carried out on their lands. States are required to consent to rural development projects after the participatory gender, and environmental impact assessments have been conducted with the full participation of rural women and after conceding their free, prior, and informed consent.⁸⁹ These recommendations are supposed to address aspects of rural women's right to access lands, covering new standards on women's land rights in marriage and family, communal land ownership, and land grabbing and evictions. However, the UN's recommendations and conference made very little difference for rural women's rights and protecting them from toxic masculinity.

In 1996, *The Dialogue of San Andres and the Rights of Indigenous Culture* called out for recognition of Indigenous rights and specified that such accordance by the *World Conference of Women in Peking* be acknowledged. It exclaimed,

“In all the reforms of the Constitution which are made, women should be included specifically, thus eliminating any official discrimination against them. We demand as well that in accordance with international conventions, ratified by the World Conference of Women in Peking, the rapes perpetrated in the conflict zones

⁸⁷ United Nation Members, “World Conferences on Women,” UN Women – Headquarters, 2013, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women>.

⁸⁸ United Women Committee, “Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women,” United Nations (United Nations, 2013), <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/committee.htm>.

⁸⁹ United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, “General Recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the Rights of Rural Women,” United Nations (United Nations, 2016), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/835897?ln=en>.

should be considered war crimes and punished as such. Women demand a re-distribution of the public budget, transferring what are now military costs towards costs of health and education programs. Women should have full participation in all the arenas of autonomy without any limiting internal or external condition.”⁹⁰- EZLN

PRI’s President Zedillo, at the time, ignored the urgency and instead enacted an increase in military presence with the support of other main political parties.

The Women’s Revolutionary Law

The Lacandon Jungle has constantly encountered an interchange and reconstruction of political and cultural production due to their immense poverty, significantly in women, lack of access to significant health and educational services, and political exclusion. This prompted the creation of women’s spaces of community organization and ways to fight for reproductive health, civil and human rights, and against sexual violence, giving them their power to make decisions over their body and destiny.

In the Zapatistas autonomous community, women hold a space where they can gather, share, and live in communal lands, where gender does not impede their participation. Women were no longer ignored by their partners and appreciated the value they possessed. Zapatismo was significant in creating these spaces where women organized and reflected on their stories and experiences to see their suppression and find ways to demand change in family and social spheres.

Religion & Patriarchy

The patrón had the maximum power, recounts a woman from Morelia,

“Sometimes the young man had to ask the patrón for a young woman’s hand [in marriage] instead of asking her father...the patrón might keep the girl as his lover

⁹⁰ Zapatista Army of National Liberation, “Indigenous Rights and San Andres - Schools for Chiapas,” School for Chiapas, 2014, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Indigenous-rights-and-San-Andres.pdf>, pg 7.

for a year before he handed her over to the young man. Then the women would have the patrón children.”⁹¹

The dominant religion in Mexico is Roman Catholic. It is passed down through generations without contemplating its discontent and intentions to abolish Indigenous culture or the deviance against its own making. In Mexico, like in many Latin American countries, religion saves women from two main things- it absolves them from the stigma of being lost women that assume to lead them to tendencies of prostitution and reinforces the dominance of patriarchy. In Christian principles, suffering came to Earth with men’s fall from the Garden of Eden. The Catechism explains the teachings of the “... original sin has radically perverted man and destroyed his freedom; they identified the sin inherited by each man with the tendency to evil (concupiscentia), which would be insurmountable.”⁹² Women in Christianity are linked to having tempted such falling of Eden and retain one of the greatest sins, the sin of lust and fornication. These biblical sins unquestionably tend to blame the women for tempting men out of their control. The women’s religious piety saves and guides them from doing further wrongdoing.

In a personal example, growing up, my father used to warn my sister and me at eight years old against dressing too provocatively or, in his words, too inappropriately, seemingly trying to diminish the sexuality of the expression. We were essentially restricted from wearing anything too tight, transparent, and short. Nevertheless, he never hesitated to think that my body was for my functionality and dressing. He did not question or scrutinize his heterosexual thinking or where it derived. Instead, the weight of gender accountability was put on a child who had done nothing but be an eight-year-old girl.

⁹¹ Klein. p. 422

⁹² Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Citta del Vaticano, “Cathchism of the Catholic Church,” Catechism of the Catholic Church - IntraText, 1993, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P1C.HTM#\\$EH](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P1C.HTM#$EH).

In similar ways, Indigenous women were held accountable for luring and inciting the wrongdoings of European men. The story of Nuhua woman Malinali Tenepat otherwise famously known as the Malinche, accounts her as Mexico's traitor that conspired against her people and contributed to the downfall of the Aztec Empire. Anzaldúa insists that this betrayal makes us believe that Indian women in mestizo culture are the betrayers and requires us to constantly supervise 'the Indian is us', making us brutalize and condemn.⁹³ The persecution of Indigenous women hides behind the systemic structures of European domination.

The damnation of Indigenous women also made fighting against religious principles difficult. The act of Indigenous women having control over their bodies was stigmatized and quickly criticized as potential prostitutes. Therefore, many accepted and internalized the oppression and convinced themselves of the lack of willpower to question divine forces. Instead, they were forced to submit to this repression and live under poor conditions, which led to minimal control over their condition and future children. Compañera Ana speaks of religion during Zapatita women's sharing.

“That was the custom, the way of life the Spanish brought when they came to conquer our peoples, as we said before, it was the friars who educated and instructed us in their customs and knowledges. From that point on they taught us that women had to serve men and pay attention to their orders, that women must cover their heads with a veil when they go to church, and that a woman shouldn't let her gaze wander just anywhere, she must keep her head down. It was believed that it was women who make men sin, and that is why the church did not permit women to go to school, much less occupy cargos. We as indigenous peoples adopted as a culture the way that the Spanish treated their women, that is why inequality between men and women arose in our communities and continues to this day.”⁹⁴

⁹³ Anzaldúa Gloria, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera* (San Francisco, Ca: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), pg 22.

⁹⁴ Compañera Ana, “Them and US. Vii.- the Smallest of Them All 3.- the Compañeras. the Long Path of the Zapatistas.V,” *Enlace Zapatista*, March 2, 2013, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2013/03/02/them-and-us-vii-the-smallest-of-them-all-3-the-companeras-the-long-path-of-the-zapatistas/>.

The Indigenous Chiapas follow a syncretic religion that blends both Mayan and European practices. Catholicism extracted and appropriated Indigenous symbols for their purposes to influence Indigenous submission. Catholicism heavily influences all of Mexico's society as most Chiapanecos follow this practice. Despite their exclusion from Catholic leadership, women carry a heavier burden and expectation to follow the religious ruling. A "good" woman is expected to strictly follow the catholic faith and surrender any control over their principal decisions to men. Regulating whom they marry and determining the number of children to birth. In rural Chiapas, Indigenous fathers possess the right to sell or marry off their daughters at a young age and consent to the passing of patriarchal authority to the husband. The husband is given total control over the young women's lives, often never letting them gain independence and declining their rights to independent work, study, and inherit the land. ⁹⁵

Colonial structures train women to accept their subordinate places of motherhood naturally. Most Indigenous women in Chiapas have a high number of children. However, the survival rate of childbirth is less than half, given that many can not afford medical access or maintain healthy diets during their pregnancy. It is common to hear some Indigenous women give birth to up to 16 children in most instances.

Like many other nations, Mexico shames unmarried women who pass a certain age or accept the idea of being childless. They question her value in society and debate her character and integrity. Instead, heteronormative conventions encourage women to romanticize the perfect partner to look up to their big wedding day and to eventually one day fulfill their ultimate dream of bearing children and completing their family. It places guilt on women who want to liberate and think outside this destiny. Moreover, the idea of becoming independent women that have

⁹⁵ Margara Millan, "3," in *Zapatista!: Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2002), pp. 64-80.

control over their autonomy and body is dispelled. Anzaldua fought this within her cultural tyranny; she demystified the following about her culture.

“Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them. How many times have I heard mothers and mothers-in-law tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them, for being hociconas (big mouths), for being callejeras (going to visit and gossip with neighbors), for expecting their husbands to help with the rearing of children and the housework, for wanting to be something other than housewives? The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males. If a woman rebels she is *mujer mala* [bad woman]. If a woman doesn’t renounce herself in favor of the male, she is selfish. If a woman remains a virgin [virgin – but with connotations of the Virgin Mary] until she marries, she is a good woman. For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother.”⁹⁶

Gender Dichotomy - Indigenous Gender Fluidity

“...maybe we don’t know what “gender equity” is or any of those other things with too many letters to count. In any case that concept of “gender equity” isn’t even well-formulated because it only refers to women and men, and even we, supposedly ignorant and backward, know that there are those who are neither men nor women and who we call “others” [otroas] but who call themselves whatever they feel like. It hasn’t been easy for them to earn the right to be what they are without having to hide because they are mocked, persecuted, abused, and murdered. Why should they be obligated to be men or women, to choose one side or the other? If they don’t want to choose then they shouldn’t be disrespected in that choice. How are we going to complain that we aren’t respected as women if we don’t respect these people? Maybe we think this way because we are just talking about what we have seen in other worlds and we don’t know a lot about these things. What we do know is that we fought for our freedom and now we have to fight to defend it so that the painful history that our grandmothers suffered is not relieved by our daughters and granddaughters.”⁹⁷ - The Zapatista Women

Gender fluidity is a concept that many Indigenous people worldwide share. However, because of the colonial gender system, gender binary norms are hyperinflated and presumed normal. Conjointly, western religion has set religious norms and traditions that governed these

⁹⁶ Anzaldua Gloria, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera* (San Francisco, Ca: Aunt Lute Books, 2012).

⁹⁷ The Zapatista Women, “Letter from the Zapatista Women to Women in Struggle around the World,” *Enlace Zapatista*, February 13, 2019, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2019/02/13/letter-from-the-zapatista-women-to-women-in-struggle-around-the-world/>.

binary gender norms and invisibilized Indigenous beings. These colonial norms have normalized the connection between sexual dimorphism with biological traits. Lugones, however, argues that gender is a precursor to biological traits. She argues through Paula Gunn Allen, a Native American poet, professor, and novelist, that intersex individuals in many Indigenous societies were recognized before colonialization and that colonization emerged with such social categorization of sex and gender. Moreover, she points to the recognition of sexual dimorphism in white bourgeois males and females that do not follow such interlinking. Lugones says,

“The cosmetic and substantive corrections to biology make very clear that “gender” is antecedent to the “biological” traits and gives them meaning. The naturalizing of sexual differences is another product of the modern use of science that Quijano points out in the case of ‘race’.”⁹⁸

She concludes that the making of dichotomous gender was a creation that served the uses of Euro-centered global capitalist domination and exploitation. The binary gender roles enforce what is accepted and deviant in a global society. Transmitting the normalization of patriarchal heterosexuality and the binary spectrum avoids the reality of the different worldviews of gender.

The domination of heterosexuality and patriarchy prevails and is made inherently natural. This meant the abolishment of all other Indigenous gender visions. In places like Mexico, stepping outside these genders, binary norms are highly condemned, and many disowned children, brothers, and sisters because of their non-conform identity. The threat and violence towards genders outside these standards keep many discreetly hidden in many instances. However, they are vital parts of their community in many Indigenous communities.

⁹⁸ María Lugones, “Heterosexuality and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): pp. 186-209, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2007.tb01156.x>, pg 7.

In Oaxaca, Mexico, *Muxe* (neither female nor male) are considered divine beings that hold a socially recognizable position in their communities. In these Indigenous societies, gender and sex are dissociated and place recognition on the importance they behold, transcendent powers that unite these two genders. *Muxes* are celebrated and regularly participate in traditional celebrations. In Mapuche, Chile, a co-gendered person takes the title of shaman healer. Comparably, these invaluable Indigenous can travel between earthly and spiritual worlds and move between genders. Their gender is assigned by their identity and spirituality, not by biological sex.⁹⁹ In the Native American population, Two-Spirit people are also held in the same appreciation. Two-Spirit is described as an umbrella for gender identity, gender expression, and orientation.¹⁰⁰ Two-Spirit movements have been highly ignored and denied by colonial LGBTQ+ movements in the US and Canada. Traditionally Two-Spirit people healed and balanced their community. Anthropological research illustrated that more than 150 different pre-colonial Native American tribes acknowledged third genders.¹⁰¹

In Zapatista communities, the *Otroa* gender is known outside the western identity of “sex-gender”. They add the “oa” ending to words to merge both gender terms. For example, instead of a feminine “a” ending in *niña* (girl) or a masculine “o” in *niño* (boy), such a term converts to *niñoa* (children). In this manner, they are not excluded and instead are integrated and made part of their community which highlights their presence. Sylvia Marcos, a professor in new vision in the field of feminism, says, “From Zapatismo from that very new and ancestral project of political philosophy, they open up another analogical way to recognize, remake and decenter (explode) conventional gender identities.” The *Otrao* expression is a concept inspired by a

⁹⁹ “Beyond Gender: Indigenous Perspectives, Muxe,” Natural History Museum, 2019, <https://nhm.org/stories/beyond-gender-indigenous-perspectives-muxe>.

¹⁰⁰ “Two-Spirit Program,” Native Justice Coalition, 2019, <https://www.nativejustice.org/twospirit>.

¹⁰¹ HRC Staff, “Two Spirit and LGBTQ Identities: Today and Centuries Ago - HRC,” Human Rights Campaign, 2020, <https://www.hrc.org/news/two-spirit-and-lgbtq-identities-today-and-centuries-ago>.

theoretical reference to the present time and space of the Zapatista communities and the essential philosophical universe of Mesoamerican ancestral legacies.¹⁰²

Devaluation of Gender Work

As a childless woman in Latin culture, the pressure of having children is highly questioned. There is constant demand to find a partner by those that pity my choice. However, they never question the added pressure that society has imposed on mothers. In a capitalist economy, mothers are discriminated against and perceived to lack time commitment in a demanding and competitive work field. I had never appreciated mothers as highly until I entered graduate school. I chose to assist my twin sister in her back-to-back experience of raising her baby and toddler. It was never so apparent the unequal responsibility her partner put on her. She had a 4-month-old baby and a 2-year-old toddler and decided to go back to work to have some independence. Her partner justified his irresponsibility to partake in equal time on the grounds of paying most of the house bills and diminishing her work production as he considered online work less demanding. At times she felt worried that she was not doing enough. I was shocked and upset by the indifference of her partner's care for her wellbeing. Understanding this indifference was part of my inclination and beginnings toward my research topic.

The power dynamics of colonial capitalism detached women's social values. Women worldwide are pressured to think their value generates from serving their male partners' needs. Forcibly conforming to Eurocentric values, Indigenous women indoctrinated their children, significantly girls, with specific gender views that reproduce the dominant social roles. Silvia

¹⁰² Sylvia Marcos, "Otroa Compañeroas: Gender Fluidity: A Contemporary Emergence with Ancestral Roots," Chiapas Support Committee, July 1, 2021, <https://chiapas-support.org/2021/06/30/otroa-companeroas-gender-fluidity-a-contemporary-emergence-with-ancestral-roots/>.

Federici, an autonomous feminist Marxist, examines women's undervaluing through capitalist production of domestic housework, which further intensifies during motherhood. Federici states,

“The difference with housework lies in the fact that not only has it been imposed on women, but it has been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character. Housework was transformed into a natural attribute, rather than being recognized as work, because it was destined to be unwaged. Capital had to convince us that it is a natural, unavoidable, and even fulfilling activity to make us accept working without a wage. In turn, the unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that housework is not work, thus preventing women from struggling against it, except in the privatized kitchen-bedroom quarrel that all society agrees to ridicule, thereby further reducing the protagonist of a struggle. We are seen as nagging bitches, not as workers in struggle.”¹⁰³

Most women lack compensation for domestic work ending in a constant state of distress to survive. Despite the independence from Spanish colonial ruling, strategic methods of Eurocentric culture have left the Indigenous women as servants to their *patróns* (boss) will and to fully provide the domestic labor for the Mexican ranches.¹⁰⁴ The Indigenous women work non-stop from morning till dawn, cooking and cleaning while still caring for their children. A Zapatista woman from Olga Isabel describes their morning starting at three am. On some occasions, the women not only take care of the kitchen roles but, in some instances, help out in the fields and return to their domestic chores when they arrive home. Their days will end at ten or eleven o'clock at night.¹⁰⁵ These routines are passed down from mother to daughter, and girls at a very young age are expected to help around the house while boys have some freedom to play. Maria, an Indigenous woman from Morelia, tells of how their partners internalized the *patrón's* mentality and influenced the treatment of women. She tells of how they had to answer to

¹⁰³ Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Brooklyn, NY: PM Press, 2020). P. 59.

¹⁰⁴ Hilary Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories* (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2015). p.391.

¹⁰⁵ Klein, p. 531.

their patrón and husband.¹⁰⁶ Federici similarly illustrates this in her argument in “Wages Against Housework”. She examines how abuse transfers over to the women as a form of their husband’s retaliation for lack of control over their abusive conditions. She says,

“ the poorer the family, the higher the enslavement of the woman, and not simply because of the monetary situation. In fact capital has a dual policy, one for the middle class and one for the working class family. It is no accident that we find the most unsophisticated machismo in the latter: the more blows the man gets at work the more his wife must be trained to absorb them, the more he is allowed to recover his ego at her expense. You beat your wife and vent your rage against her when you are frustrated or overtired by your work or when you are defeated in a struggle (but to work in a factory is already a defeat). The more the man serves and is bossed around, the more he bosses around.”¹⁰⁷

Although Federici speaks of the specifics of industrial factory work, one can compare menial labor within the same context of abuse. It is common to hear of Indigenous men abusing their wives, and sadly many elders tend to advise women to hide their mistreatment. On occasions where families defend their daughters from the misconduct of their husbands, very little authoritative enforcement resolves such conditions.¹⁰⁸ As a result, many are left undefended and learn to endure physical and psychological warfare.

Moving Slowly within the Resistance

“...those above have taken turns and continue to take turns in order to govern, badly, or aspire to do so. In past and present calendars, their proposal continues to be the same: that we offer our blood, while they lead or pretend to lead. Before and now, they forget those of us who do not forget. And always, yesterday and today, the woman is below, even in the collective that we were and are.”¹⁰⁹
 - Subcomandante Insurgente Moises y Subcomandante Marcos
 Change is a slow and continuous process. In August of 2004, the Zapatista

admitted that women had not reached equal status with men as they released a series of communiqués explaining how autonomous communities are governed. However,

¹⁰⁶ IBD, p. 556

¹⁰⁷ Federici, p.63.

¹⁰⁸ Klein, p. 541.

¹⁰⁹ Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés and Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, “The Walls above, the Cracks below (and to the Left),” Enlace Zapatista, February 16, 2017, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2017/02/16/the-walls-above-the-cracks-below-and-to-the-left/>.

centuries of discriminating against women, processing, and actively incorporating new ways require constant willpower to disconnect from biases that falsely made specific gender roles. Breaking these gender roles threatens and emasculates masculine identity. Allowing women to hold leadership positions in the army was the first evident struggle. Major Ana tells of how during the Ocosingo clash, Zapatista women's military presented the importance of their participation and leadership.

“Before the war, the men were suspicious and uneasy with a woman in command. Things were crazy; I spent all my time patching up quarrels. It was, ‘I’m not taking orders from her because she’s a bird. How am I going to do that?’ That’s the way they’ve been taught... The fighting in Ocosingo put an end to that because the best combatants were the women officers. They got the wounded out of the trap. Some of them still have pieces of shrapnel in their bodies. They got people out; they got them out alive. That was the end of the problem of whether women were fit for command or not.”¹¹⁰

The other aspect of importance was the domestic family sphere, where daily interactions required constant practice. Letting go of the daily habits that have been deeply embedded requires the courage to see both themselves and their partners in a different perspective that displaces male power. For those non-Europeans that have lacked power in various structures of society, it takes great effort to change, something that relies on the individual to constantly be conscious of repeating such oppressive power. In domestic household and childcare responsibilities, the women asked their partners to participate actively.

“We want the men to learn how to prepare their own food. We want them to stay at home to look after the children, so that we women can leave the house. We want them to raise the chickens. And we want them to stop being jealous-sometimes they don’t let us participate out of jealousy. They shouldn’t reproach the women. They accuse us of traveling [to other villages] and looking for a boyfriend, and they don’t let us hold positions in the autonomous

¹¹⁰ Margara Millan, “3,” in *Zapatista!: Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2002), pp. 64-80, pg 73.

government. Men should be punished if they don't defend women's rights."¹¹¹
 - Zapatista Women

In 1993, *Encuentros* (gatherings) allowed women to partake and share their stories among women of different generations. This was significantly impactful for women who lacked public and independent leadership roles. The gatherings founded the creation of the *Women's Revolutionary Law* that was enacted within the Zapatista movement in 1994. Striving towards equality for women, in 2003, the Zapatista held *The Third Encuentro of the Zapatista with the People of the World* named after Comandante Ramona, a significant figure of the EZLN and the small but powerful women I begin my introduction with. Looking to gather all the world's women together and emphasize "the struggle began before and continued after," they voiced all the different testimonies of resistance. Campañeras opened up their homes, kitchens, and families to foreigners who listened to the various ways they were subjected to triple oppression. Adherent to its international component of *La Otra Campaña (The Other Campaign)*, they begin constructing their international solidarity campaign that brings together leftist movements, otherwise known as "from the left and from below." The women emphasized that their collective liberation was as crucial as the need to have women spaces where they could empower themselves, "they emphasized that the movement included their brothers, husbands, children, elders...everyone in the community."¹¹²

Land Rights for Women

¹¹¹ Mariana Mora, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 2017), pg 162.

¹¹² Cory Fisher-Hoffman et al., "The First Zapatista Women's Encuentro: A Collective Voice of Resistance," <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Womens-Encuentro-a-collective-voice-of-resistance-1.pdf>, January 24, 2008, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Womens-Encuentro-a-collective-voice-of-resistance-1.pdf>, pg 7.

“You think we women don’t know how to use a machete? We do know. And we know how to work the land and when to clear it and when to burn and when to plant.”¹¹³
 - The Cat Dog Notebook, EZLN

The Zapatistas demand “the lands should be owned by those who work on them.”¹¹⁴ Both women and men work in the *milpas* (farmland) of Chiapas, Mexico; however, some Indigenous women commonly work the land depending on cultural tradition. Gender was not indicative of their merit; both were thought of as invaluable parts of sustaining life.

The lack of land ownership and political leadership for women has shown the lack of intent to provide sovereignty to women. In Chiapas, like most of Latin America, women bear a more significant disadvantage when their people lose their land rights. However, women bear the primary responsibility of caring, upbringing, and the survival of their children. For many Zapatista women, obtaining land rights depend on marital status and male guarantors, creating a dependency. This results from a patrilineal bloodline that grants men the sole responsibility and capability of holding such ownership.

No other than women understand the fragile care for life; the many Indigenous women of Chiapas are majority mothers familiar with the care of their family. Securing land rights is closely linked to providing food for them and their family and lowering the risk of domestic violence by giving them greater economic security and choosing to stay or leave abusive relationships. Land provides security and the right to exercise autonomy in different areas of life exclusively for women and their children, whose wellbeing is closely tied to survival. In a workshop titled “The Rights of Women with Our Customs and Traditions” held in 1994 in San Cristobal de las Casas, women questioned traditions and defined new ways of acting.

¹¹³ THE CAT-DOG’S NOTEBOOK, “Lessons on Geography and Globalized Calendars,” Enlace Zapatista, May 9, 2017, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2017/05/08/lessons-on-geography-and-globalized-calendars/>.

¹¹⁴ Land Belongs to Those Who Work It (Vimeo, 2005), <https://vimeo.com/45615376>.

"We propose there be a law that demands that women be given land because we also work, eat and have needs ... We should have the right to inherit land, the right to credit and to have our own decent house, the right to start and direct productive projects."¹¹⁵

Women seek the right to land as it enables them to participate in economic security and produce their freedom to determine their future. Control of their land allows them to first and foremost achieve centering Indigenous traditions and focus on collaborative works that achieve equitable gender relations, for example, harvest agro-ecological food practices that allow sovereignty over their health and their children's wellbeing.

Women's Co-ops and Collectives

"In regards to the triple oppression suffered by indigenous women (because they are poor, indigenous and women) there are demands for the construction of a new national society with another economic, political, social and cultural model which includes all women and all Mexicans. Among the public resources which belong to the indigenous peoples there should be a special consignment for women, administered and managed by them. This will give them the economic capacity so that they can begin their own productive projects, guarantee them potable water and enough food for everyone, and allow them to protect health and improve the quality of housing."¹¹⁶

Despite the government's indifference towards the Indigenous women's oppression attributed to corrupted policies, Zapatista women have united to form collectives and cooperate with centuries-long Indigenous traditions like weaving. *Mujeres por la Dignidad (Women for Dignity)* is a cooperative of volunteer teachers from the Oventic Zapatista autonomous school. The Zapatista teachers participate in teaching other women the practice of weaving. Their support services the women's movement by helping them become economically independent.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Margara Millan, "3," in *Zapatista!: Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2002), pp. 69.

¹¹⁶ Zapatista Army of National Liberation, "Indigenous Rights and San Andres - Schools for Chiapas," *Schools for Chiapas*, 2014, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Indigenous-rights-and-San-Andres.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ Weaving For Justice, "Weaving Cooperatives," *Weaving For Justice*, June 18, 2019, <https://weaving-for-justice.org/weaving-cooperatives/>.

The Zapatistas used their skills in embroidery work where women gathered in cooperatives to encourage each other and secure fair costs. Cooperatives are also spaces where women discuss personal and political issues. In this perspective, “the politicization of activities traditionally associated with the feminine sphere, and which allow for control over a social life, become a type of matrix that grants meaning to the other aspects of autonomy.”¹¹⁸ This collective participation blends economic, political, and individual aspects together to create what Mora remarks as a, “process of collective self-reflection.” Through this process, the micro-politics of everyday life form new knowledge that attends to the community’s inequalities.

Zapatista embroidery was used in a *Zapantera Negra* (a union between Zapatista and Black Panthers) project, which merged art, dialogue, and local activities between artists and cultural spaces. The *Zapantera Negra* project was a crowd-funded exhibition of Emory Douglas’s artists from the EDELO in San Cristobal de las Casa. Emory Douglas’s art piece showcased the working of two embroidery collectives. Douglas was the Black Panther’s Minister of Culture. The *Zapantera Negra* art outlines half of Douglas’s upper body and two corn husks that replaced the stylized machine gun. *Maize* has been a staple crop and life force for the Zapatistas.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Mariana Mora, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 2017), pg 161.

¹¹⁹ Madison Treece, “Zapatista Embroidery as Speech Act in Zapantera Negra,” SEQUITUR we follow art Zapatista Embroidery as Speech Act in Zapantera Negra Comments, January 1, 1966, <https://www.bu.edu/sequitur/2017/12/01/treece-zapatista/>.



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“May the Earth Tremble at its Core”- María de Jesús Patricio Martínez (Marichuy)

“May the Earth Tremble at its Core” was a communique released in 2016 to commemorate the *National Indigenous Council (CNI)* and create a grassroots political structure. The decision to support the 2018 presidential candidacy of Maria de Jesus Patricio, also known as Marichuy, came as a usual surprise for many supporters of the EZLN. After two decades of disillusion with electoral politics in Mexico, the EZLN advocated for Indigenous to govern themselves autonomously. Many questioned the commitment to autonomy and rejected living outside these oppressive structures. However, there was a broader significance to the election of

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¹²¹ Madison Treece, Zapatista Women’s Embroidery Collective Interpretation of Emory Douglas Illustration, photograph, Zapatista Embroidery as Speech Act in Zapantera Negra (San Cristóbal de las Casas, December 1, 2017), EDELO , <https://www.bu.edu/sequitur/2017/12/01/treece-zapatista/>.

Marichuy as they announced that such a move still rejects the alliance of existing parties and pushes for a different Mexico and organizing a new political initiative such as the one proposed in *The Other Campaign*. A new agenda called for the organization of a significant national movement that would shift the social relations between national and Indigenous people, develop new national programs, and emerge with a system that rules accordingly to the welfare of citizens. While the probability stood little chance of winning in a highly corrupted and rigged system, the effort helped construct national grassroots movements that compelled a push to put Indigenous issues at the forefront of national issues. They announced,

“We confirm that our struggle is not for power; rather we are calling upon native peoples and civil society to organize to stop this destruction, to strengthen our resistance and rebellion in defense of the life of each person, each family, collective, community, and neighborhood. To build peace and justice working from below, from where we are what we are. It is time for rebel dignity, to build a new nation for all people, to strengthen the power of the anticapitalist left, and to make offenders pay for the pain of the people of Mexico.”¹²²

In January 2017, the CNI formed the *CIG (Indigenous Council of Government)* and intended to give a voice to 525 Indigenous communities in Mexico. Consulting and following the orders of their Indigenous Zapatistas and Non-Zapatista, the EZLN collaborated with the demands of its Indigenous people by supporting the actions of the CIG and standing behind the CIG's candidacy spokeswoman Marichuy. Marichuy was an independent candidate that reflects the intentional way of positioning 'Power from Below,' the Zapatista principle that dismantles hierarchical order and places it in the hands of their collective people and the leadership of an Indigenous woman.

The settler colonial state retains much of Mexico in its dangerous conditions of poverty, corruption, and violence way passed its colonial period. The discriminatory power structures are

¹²² Rasec Niembro, “The Zapatista Candidate,” *Jacobin*, 2017, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/01/ezln-zapatista-2018-elections-subcommandante-marcos-lopez-obrador-pena-nieto/>.

evident in the destruction of Indigenous, specifically Mayan territories, cultures, intersubjectivities, and knowledge in Chiapas. Eurocentric power structures have secured the practice of power and authority of European control and hegemony with the makings of their nation-state and modernity. Both concepts of Eurocentric restructuring of new social order and civilizations' demoralized progress. It has kept *finqueros* and *caciques* in bond with disreputable but dominant political parties that control much of the land, labor, resource, and products in the Chiapas region. In the quest of accumulating wealth for a small number of people, the capitalist monster requires constant exploitation of the most vulnerable to fulfill its needs. These Neoliberal policies leech off the most vulnerable population of Indigenous people and on what little they have.

Additionally, obscure power structures detrimentally discriminate against Indigenous women. This intersection between the hierarchy of racism, class, and gender order created their triple oppression that justifies the rape, violence, and abuse of Indigenous women as land and water protectors. NAFTA took away their small communal lands as a further threat to their living conditions. Their last path to survive gave no other alternative to the Zapatista women but to finally organize and rise in arms against the bad Mexican government. In the following chapter, we will go over the significant force of authority through the military, and paramilitary, ensuring the colonial structure in power utilized to cause further fear, violence, and massacres and designed to keep those abusive powers in place.

Chapter 2: “We Won’t Back Down” - Modernity and Nation State & Authority

“As the Zapatista communities that we are, we see signs. But perhaps we are wrong as the people that we are. You see how they call us ignorant, backwards, conservative, against progress, pre-modern, barbaric, uncivilized, unwelcome and inconvenient. Maybe that’s true. Maybe we are backwards because here, as the women that we are and the otros that we are, we can go out without fear that we’ll be attacked, raped, butchered and disappeared. Maybe we are against

progress because we are opposed to the megaprojects that destroy nature, destroy us as peoples, and leave death as the next generation's inheritance. Maybe we are against modernity because we oppose a given train, road, dam, thermoelectric plant, mall, airport, mine, or toxic waste dump, the destruction of a forest, the polluting of rivers and lakes, and the cult of fossil fuels. Maybe we are backwards because we honor the land instead of money. Maybe we are barbaric because we grow our own food and because we work to live and not to make money. Maybe we are inappropriate and inconvenient because we govern ourselves as the people that we are and because we see the work of government as one of the many responsibilities that we as community members must carry out. Maybe we are rebellious because we do not sell out, give up, or surrender. Maybe we are everything that they say about us.”¹²³- The Zapatista Maritime Squadron, known as the “421st Squadron”

Indigenous land defenders of the Zapatista 421st squadron accept their ‘backwardness’ in Eurocentric modernity. The backwardness envisions living in harmony and dignity and refuses to accept cultures that live in violence, fear men, and repress women. Progress for nation-states comes with a hefty cause of destruction and favors desirable results to Westernized worlds. Maintaining repressive standards requires the constant removal and silence of those willing to defend their land and against the individualist and egotistic invasion. The protection of such an authoritative ideology fundamentally links to the colonial powers of coloniality.

Colonial power and the expansion of Western values became invested in what is known as modernity, a progressive future that, according to Mignolo, is the ugly but inseparable side of coloniality that arose from the Renaissance and developed through the Enlightenment period.¹²⁴

Mignolo states,

“...coloniality remains as the hidden side of modernity, and why there cannot be modernity without coloniality. The places defined by the interaction between modernity and coloniality are the places where the colonial difference is being played out in a constant conflict. Imperial narratives were entangled with national narratives and the emergence of nation-states (modern or modern/colonial)

¹²³ The Zapatista Maritime Squadron, known as the “421st Squadron”, “Only 500 Years Later,” Enlace Zapatista, August 17, 2021, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/08/17/only-500-years-later/>.

¹²⁴ Mignolo, Walter D. Essay. In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 2–3. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

became an exemplar of the linear process and the advancement of global human history”.¹²⁵

At the turn of the 20th century, Mexico’s Independence from Spain lingered with ideas of Eurocentric progress. One way Mexico tried to encourage the development of such ideas was by uniting its country under the same vision of European cultural superiority and encouraging nationalism. Trying to find common ground between citizens of mestizo, European, and Indigenous descent meant erasing Indigenous culture as it was reasonably easier than mestizos recognizing a sense of attachment to their land. As a result, Indigenous Mexicans lack citizenship and a national identity leaving Indigenous cultural identity in constant environments of war.

Coloniality has put Indigenous people in dehumanizing states of conflict that normalized the practices of eliminating and enslaving such subjects. Maldonado-Torres explains that worlds that were once centered on the dynamics of human relations are now “permanent forms of conquest, colonialism, and war.”¹²⁶ Areas like Chiapas, Mexico, which are economically deprived, are made into war zones of crime and violence due to poverty that develops from operating principles of colonialism. Maldonado-Torres refers to the modern/colonial paradigm of war as regions where unusual behavior becomes normalized and ordinary. As Maldonado-Torres explains, “This paradigm can be in effect in actual wars and genocidal practices as well as in democratic societies. That metaphysical catastrophe is linked to Western civilization and war and that it leads to the naturalization of war explains why colonial conditions in modernity resemble perpetual war zones where extreme violence and constant low-level violence are continually

¹²⁵ Mignolo, p. 162.

¹²⁶ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality,” 2016, http://caribbeanstudiesassociation.org/docs/Maldonado-Torres_Outline_Ten_Theses-10.23.16.pdf, pg 12.

directed to colonized populations and those who are identified as their descendants.”¹²⁷ Policies that further dispossess and eradicated ways of life were suitable for NAFTA to develop in.

Death to Humanity, NAFTA

NAFTA was a product of neoliberalism and the powerful financial institutions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. Neoliberalism reforms economic policies that strategically have globally impacted nations all over Latin America such as Mexico. With origins in European economic theories from Adam Smith’s 1776 “The Wealth of Nations” to John Maynard Keynes economist theory which advocates for the abolition of government intervention from any economic influence. This free trade method ended with restriction on manufacturing, barriers to commerce and tariffs. Much of its conservative rhetoric to poor and working people is presented as trickle down economics which ultimately benefit corporations with tax breaks. In an 1996 *Encuentro* named “Intercontinental por la Humanidad y contra el Neoliberalismo” (Intercontinental for Humanity and against Neoliberalism), Subcomandante Marcos disputed: “what the Right offers is to turn the world into one big mall where they can buy Indians here, women there...”¹²⁸ Some of the main points to this working class threat implicates the cutting of public expenditure for social services, deregulation, eliminating the concept of “the public good” or “community”, implementing the Rule of the Market (“liberating “free” enterprise or private enterprise from any bonds imposed by government matter no matter how much social damage caused”)¹²⁹ and privatization. Privatization was exactly what killed the peasant community land of *ejidos* and handed over to privatized elites.

¹²⁷ IBD., pg 12.

¹²⁸ Elizabeth Martinez and Arnoldo Garcia, “What Is Neoliberalism?,” CorpWatch, January 1, 1997, <https://www.corpwatch.org/article/what-neoliberalism>.

¹²⁹ Elizabeth Martinez and Arnoldo Garcia, “What Is Neoliberalism?,” CorpWatch, January 1, 1997, <https://www.corpwatch.org/article/what-neoliberalism>.

NAFTA's brutal and money greedy pursuit left many peasants out of work and subsistence. Many workers of the land would be threatened further by subsidizing American agriculture that dictated the course and leverage of the produced gains. Many Mexicans lost jobs and resorted to ultimately taking the long and dangerous trek to immigrate to places like the United States that were reaping the benefits of this trade agreement. Women were left alone to fend for their lives along with their children.

Outside rural areas of Mexico, the integration of NAFTA has dramatically influenced the rise of multinational corporations and *maquiladoras* (duty and tariff-free factories). Many Mexican jobs' wages plummeted, and many women and single mothers ended up in these low-wage jobs with no security for their working conditions. As many as half-a-million Mexican workers, two-thirds of whom are women, are lured to Mexico's maquiladoras. Assembly plants are run by cheap labor, lax health and safety standards, and weak toxic-waste dumping laws.¹³⁰ Border cities like Ciudad Juarez were known to suffer high numbers of abused women. News of women who disappeared, raped, and murdered propelled the machismo culture and tainted their cities with the known reputation of femicide. The protection of neoliberalism's NAFTA policies and the emergence of the EZLN revolution has evolved with an increase in Mexico's paramilitary unleashing violence upon the Chiapas Mayan Indigenous.

Transforming Land and Indigenous People into an Extractivist Economy

"...the world's indigenous population (300 million people) inhabits areas containing 60 percent of the planet's natural resources: "It is not surprising, then, that many conflicts break out in order to take over their lands"¹³¹

¹³⁰ Miriam Davidson, "Women of the Maquiladoras." *Agni*, no. 36 (1992): 21–33.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23009463>. pg 21.

¹³¹ Subcomandante Marcos, "The Fourth World War Has Begun - Thebasebk.org," August 1997,
<https://thebasebk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Subcomandante-Marcos-The-Fourth-World-War-Has-Begun.pdf>.

As aforementioned in Quijano’s power matrix, capitalism requires both the control of labor production and its resources and products. The combination of Indigenous heritage denial and embracing liberal capitalist nation-statehood, as seen through NAFTA, had a significant impact on Indigenous land and people within Mexico. Capitalism’s pervasiveness breeds competition and seeks to profit from those most vulnerable to its condition. Hence, the poor become poorer, and more resources are needed, depleting their source. This sharp increase has led to the intensive extraction of resources, leading to biodiversity loss and environmental disasters initially felt in those fragile regions with vulnerable conditions that were once previously colonized.

A prime example is Barris’s case study of the Ecuadorian Yasuni region. She concludes, “the law is embedded within a global political economic and interstate system that does not serve as a steward to the natural world but sells it to the highest commodity market.”¹³² Coloniality displaced Indigenous identities and replaced a culture’s deep understanding of tending to the land and instead instilled a culture of trapping the environment under the manipulation and control of human power. It links Indigenous people and the environment as wild beasts that need to be tamed or manipulated for human consumption and progress. Furthermore, it disintegrates the human and environment relations that understand the interconnectedness between the two.

A 2021 Zapatista communique reported that the Mexican government granted protection to the violent *cacique* (local petty tyrants) that enforced the appropriation of Indigenous land while also carrying out multiple forms of cruelty against the people of Azquetltán, municipality of Villa Guerrero, state of Jalisco, Mexico.¹³³ Subsequently, the EZLN jointly battled to maintain

¹³² Gomez Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), pp. 29.

¹³³ National Indigenous Congress/ Indigenous Governing Council Zapatista Army for National Liberation, “Against Repression by the Bad Governments in Support of the Escuela Normal MACTUMACTZÁ in Chiapas and of the Tepehuano and WIXÁRIKA Peoples in Jalisco,” *Enlace Zapatista*, May 29, 2021,

and regain back their land. The Indigenous land of Chiapas, Mexico, is one of the most abundant natural water sources providing 30 % of Mexico's freshwater supply.¹³⁴ Additionally, vast oil reserves, exotic wood, and uranium ascend the Mexican government's interest in this specific area of Mexico.

A major battle against the environment and human life is situated with megaprojects like the Tren Maya (Mayan Train) that will run across the Yucatan peninsula of the southern states of Mexico. A Mexican think tank, "Instituto de Política Internacional" praises and justifies the Mayan Train project as an economical and sustainable opportunity to bring most people around the project out of poverty and benefit their wellbeing. It sees very little danger in destroying Indigenous homes and instead signals that most of the region has been in bad condition due to past logging and poaching. Moreover, it admits it will eventually cause some damage to its environment and justifies the colonial trajectory of development as,

"... all human societies have exploited natural resources and developed projects for their collective benefit with the technology available to them. The greater and more sophisticated the technology, the greater the potential for good, and for harm. This imposes enormous responsibility on governments, enterprises, scientists and communities, but to condemn all major projects is surely nihilistic and futile."¹³⁵

Current President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, AMLO, limits his attention to the benefits of big corporations like hotels. However, it excludes the consequences for most people living around the proposed project site. *La Jornada*, Mexico's leading daily journalism, wrote that AMLO reassures its people to begin its determined Tren Maya project by late 2023. AMLO

<https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/05/29/against-repression-by-the-bad-governments-in-support-of-the-escuel-a-normal-mactumactza-in-chiapas-and-of-the-tepehuano-and-wixarika-peoples-in-jalisco/>.

¹³⁴ Iker Reyes Godelmann, "The Zapatista Movement: The Fight for Indigenous Rights in Mexico," Australian Institute of International Affairs, 2014,

<https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/news-item/the-zapatista-movement-the-fight-for-indigenous-rights-in-mexico/#:~:text=Chiapas%20is%20one%20of%20the,marginalised%20state%20in%20the%20country>

¹³⁵ David Raby, "Mexico's Mayan Train: Myths and Realities," Instituto de Política Internacional, June 18, 2021, <https://politicainternacional.com.mx/en/2021/06/18/mexicos-mayan-train-myths-and-realities/>.

confirms deals are being made with the (elite hotel) owners of the land and ‘concerted expropriations’ were made, “...some who are not charging because they recognize that the train will facilitate the arrival of their own workers and tourists. “He goes on to admire the receptiveness of those businesses and speaks of the benefits of the rural infrastructure. ¹³⁶

Many Maya people are discontent and oppose the project. Pedro Uc, a member of the “Assembly of Mayan Territory Defenders Múuch’ Xiinbal” disapproves of the destruction of their land. He insists, “From the very start, we said that it was not ours, that it is a project that goes against the Mayan peoples and we cannot accept something that will bring harm to our lives.” Uc explains, “the train is as an ‘attack’ on the environment and Mayan identity.” The Mayan train is part of a development business project to continue the attack on their territory. Indigenous that speak up against the train have commonly received death threats. Nevertheless, AMLO has pushed forward to complete the project in accelerated time and even declared the megaproject considered a matter of “national security”. Given authorities power to speed up specific procedures such as grant permits and licenses and extend provisional construction permits to keep the project going at full speed. ¹³⁷

Somos de *Maiz*

Neoliberalism guided policies that cater to multinational corporations such as Cargill and the biotech seeds industry. The devastation of Indigenous corn has been genetically modified to supplement ethanol-based fuel investment. Since the 1980s and with the coming of NAFTA, misguided policies have savagely undercut Campesino farm production resulting in farmers’

¹³⁶ Fabiola Martínez y Roberto Garduño, “Operará El Tren Maya a Finales De 2023: López Obrador,” La Jornada (La Jornada, January 20, 2022),

<https://www.jornada.com.mx/notas/2022/01/20/politica/operara-el-tren-maya-a-finales-de-2023-lopez-obrador/>.

¹³⁷ Gerard Soler, “Tren Maya, the Mexican Megaproject Threatening the Ecosystems of the Yucatán Peninsula,” Equal Times, 2022, <https://www.equaltimes.org/tren-maya-the-mexican-megaproject#.YpIPNJPMJZo>.

capacity to compete against the subsidized American corn states.¹³⁸ Indigenous Campesino were again disrupted from achieving food sovereignty and adequate subsistence for their community.

“For us, the indigenous, corn is sacred. If these agro-chemical companies are trying to get rid of our corn, it is like wanting to get rid of a part of our culture which we inherited from our Mayan ancestors. We know that corn is our primary and daily food, it is the base of our culture.”¹³⁹

- Zapatista Education Promoter at the National Forum in Defense of Mexican Corn Mexico City, January 2002

We are made of corn, says the Zapatista. Corn is a staple food for the Indigenous in Latin America. Much of their diets consist of this high fiber maize grown for 9,000 years. Although much of Mexico could generate an abundance of corn demand, only $\frac{1}{3}$ is exported due to the open market and free trade agreements that benefit the American economy.¹⁴⁰ Traditional foods have a strong symbolic as well as physical tie to the push for food sovereignty. *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, explains NAFTA’s adverse outcomes to these healthy and culturally appropriate foods.

“The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) complicated the situation by altering tariffs on corn imports. Mexico already imports some corn from the United States, but under NAFTA this amount will undoubtedly increase. NAFTA establishes a yearly, duty-free import quota of 2.5 million metric tons, with tariffs on amounts over that, and a total linear phase-out of tariffs over 15 years (Hufbauer and Schott 1993:47-57). In the words of the Zapatistas' Sub-Comandante Marcos, "NAFTA is the death certificate for the indigenous people of Mexico." Little wonder that some Chiapas farmers began to feel they were victims of a conspiracy in which they soon would be without a market for their crops and no land to grow them on anyway.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Peter Rosset, “The ‘Tortilla Crisis’ in Mexico : Via Campesina,” Via Campesina English, February 11, 2007, <https://viacampesina.org/en/the-qtortilla-crisisq-in-mexico/>.

¹³⁹ Peter Brown, “Mother Seeds in Resistance from the Lands of Chiapas,” School for Chiapas, 2005, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Mother-Seeds-in-Resistance-from-the-Lands-of-Chiapas1.pdf>.

¹⁴⁰ Peter Rosset, “The ‘Tortilla Crisis’ in Mexico : Via Campesina,” Via Campesina English, February 11, 2007, <https://viacampesina.org/en/the-qtortilla-crisisq-in-mexico/>.

¹⁴¹ James D Nations, “The Ecology of the Zapatista Revolt,” *Cultural Survival*, March 1, 1994, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/ecology-zapatista-revolt#sthash.PFnVTjRe.dpuf>.

Following the principle of *Here the People Command and the Government Obeys*, the Zapatista governance formed a project named the “Mother Seed in Resistance” in the Spring of 2004. Westerner Peter Brown from the School for Chiapas describes his personal experience within the Zapatista communities.

“I watched as Chol and Tzeltal farmers arrived in droves for the important religious and civil school dedication ceremonies which were to take place that day in the civilian government center. During massive celebrations just eight months earlier the autonomous, indigenous government of the north of Chiapas had assumed their provocative yet fitting title of “The New Seed Which is Going to Produce”. Now it seemed appropriate that the Good Government Board serving the entire north of Chiapas would call upon their communities to bring a part of their first corn harvest to this important community gathering. Unfortunately the celebratory school dedications as well as the productive spring harvest were shadowed by threats of GMO contamination imported from my country...Zapatista officials calmly explained their request of farmers to donate seed, their decision to send seed outside of Chiapas, and their decision to test corn for transgenic contamination.”¹⁴² - Peter Brown, School for Chiapas

Along with corn being an essential ingredient in their diets, growing corn is also a traditional avenue where their community collectively works together to harvest its crops. Corn for the Zapatista has been part of their *milpas* where monocropping is wrongfully limiting and suited for profitability rather than nourishing its people. The *milpa* system is a triad of corn, bean, and squash that has not only been a cultural experience and an agricultural heritage of Mesoamerica biodiversity and sustainable practices. This sustainable system is one of the Zapatistas' hopes of maintaining control of their land, often through physical resistance and organization.

Paramilitary & Counterinsurgency

¹⁴² Peter Brown, “Mother Seeds in Resistance from the Lands of Chiapas,” School for Chiapas, 2005, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Mother-Seeds-in-Resistance-from-the-Lands-of-Chiapas1.pdf>.

There is a long history of paramilitaries throughout Latin America, including Mexico. The federal government's role in the country's ongoing menace and violence against Indigenous people is undeniable, and many Mayan communities are under constant threat. The paramilitary is linked to right-wing armed groups and has deep ties to the federal army. The government's tactical strategy sends paramilitary groups when it rejects to intervene directly. Such as the incident in the 1997 Acteal massacre and the 1996 Viejo Velasco Massacre. In both situations, paramilitary were a short distance away and capable of intervening but refused to interfere. Much of the goal of these massacres was used to implant fear in the communities and abandon their land.

Acteal was a pacifist Tzotzil community where Las Abejas (The Bees) was the most active civic organization in the highlands of Chiapas. The peaceful mobilization advocated for the Indigenous community's autonomy and brought awareness of the paramilitary groups in Mexico. On December 22nd, 1997, the Acteal Massacre killed 45 Indigenous people- 21 were women, four of whom were pregnant, 15 children, and nine men. Some stories tell of men slashing the pregnant woman's body open. The villagers were praying for peace in a small chapel when over 100 paramilitaries opened fire and began a rapid rampage of bullets. The bad government offered an "amicable agreement" in a public apology to the families. However, hoping to hold the government accountable, Las Abejas rejected such an agreement and asked for an investigation into the murders and search for the perpetrators to be held accountable.¹⁴³ After more than 20 years of mourning the deaths of family members, not much has been done by

¹⁴³ Changiz M. Varzi, "In Mexico 'There Is No Pandemic for Paramilitary Groups,'" Equal Times, 2021, <https://www.equaltimes.org/in-mexico-there-is-no-pandemic-for?lang=en#.YpGgz5PMJZp>.

part of the government. At one point, 79 people were arrested; however, the Mexican Supreme Court ordered their release a year later.¹⁴⁴

ORCA (Regional Organization of Coffee Growers of Ocosingo) was made up of 12 communities in the municipality of Ocosingo, Chiapas, in 1988. It was formed to organize the fair price of coffee and a solution to the agrarian backlog attracting more communities from the region. In its beginnings, ORCA maintained a connection with Zapatismo, but after the 1990s, it was tempted by the governments' support and sway by exchange of favors. In 2000 with the new governor of Chiapas, Pablo Salazar, and lured by access to state funds, ORCA abandoned its principles, and its relationship with the EZLN broke apart. ORCA, since then, has been known as a paramilitary organization used to tragically carry out a violent attack against Zapatista support bases and communities.¹⁴⁵

In 1998 the Mexican army stormed into the EZLN community based on disarming dangerous organized groups. Small frame Tzotzil women carrying babies on their backs armed themselves with sticks and stones to impede the heavily armed Mexican soldiers from entering the highland of *Xo'yep* in Ocosingo. On January 3rd, a human wall of women and children detained 70 soldiers from entering the Morelia community at gunpoint. The women secure their homes by constructing a 24 hours checkpoint tracking any foreign vehicles passing through. On January 8th, several hundred soldiers appeared, and 60 women rushed towards them, flinging sticks and stones to deter them from proceeding.¹⁴⁶ The resistance was partially coordinated by women. Zapatista women's participation destabilizes gender roles that challenge exclusionary

¹⁴⁴ Changiz M. Varzi, "23 Years of Impunity for Perpetrators of Acteal Massacre," NACLA, December 2020, <https://nacla.org/news/2020/12/21/23-years-impunity-acteal-massacre>.

¹⁴⁵ Anonymous Contributor, "The Long History of ORCAO Paramilitary Violence and Impunity in Chiapas," It's Going Down, September 22, 2021, <https://itsgoingdown.org/history-orcao-paramilitary-violence-impunity-chiapas/>.

¹⁴⁶ Mariana Mora, "The EZLN and Indigenous Autonomous Municipalities," School for Chiapas, April 1998, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Mariana-Mora-Indigenous-Autonomous-Municipalities.pdf>.

Mexican state policies. Mexican administration traditionally uses violence against organized women to counteract the resistance and as a form of masculine domination of power.

Dismantling Power- Towards Freedom Healing words of Marichuy

Rather than the ruling of an individual, they propose the candidacy of Marichuy as a spokeswoman that will speak on behalf of Mexico's Indigenous democratic council and its steady democratic process, which incorporates community approval in all government decisions. The now 58-year-old Marichuy, a Mayan Indigenous woman born and raised in Tuxpan, Jalisco, was gifted with healing people's ailments with herbal remedies. The continual shortage of doctors and lack of money to buy Western medicine in her community motivated Marichuy to preserve the traditional medicinal practice of making remedies that her grandmother had given her to cure stress, coughs, or diarrhea. In a more ambitious mission, Marichuy set on healing a country torn "by rampant violence, political corruption, and economic inequality."¹⁴⁷ Her nomination was chosen by the CNI coalition of native ethnic groups to put forth the concerns and problems of their towns. At the 2018 inauguration of the women of the CNI and CIG meeting with the women who struggle. Marichuy proclaims:

"Well, what the laws do, everything they use, is to fuck with those who are below, the workers in the countryside and the city, the teachers, young people, students, women, indigenous peoples, everyone, well. So, we thought it was necessary and therefore we considered participating in this electoral process in order to make visible the problems that we have below, and ask that there is no other way out than the organization of ourselves below. In this way, by organizing ourselves below, we are going to dismantle this power held by those who have power and money, those of the bad government, well, right? So that is why this proposal for this rapprochement as women, is one of the groups that appears in... well, not so much the agenda of the Indigenous Governing Council, but some tasks that we

¹⁴⁷ Duncan Tucker, "Mexico Needs Healing': The First Indigenous Woman to Run for President," *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, June 12, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/12/mexico-maria-de-jesus-patricio-martinez-indigenous-woman-president>.

already considered in a meeting that was held on nine topics that we consider to be that way we could organize ourselves, and it is a proposal that is not there... So there are nine working groups that today I think is what is going to be worked on at the tables, so they are "land and territory", "justice", "autonomy", "women", "youth and children", "people with different capacities", "sexual diversity", "work and exploitation" and "migrants and displaced persons", because not all of them are migrants, someone corrected us, "no, there are also displaced people". So these are the issues that are going to be addressed, they are the issues that have already been discussed with the Indigenous Governing Council, and that we believe we could walk through there."¹⁴⁸ - María De Jesús Patricio (Mari Chuy)

This move was meaningful in transmitting a message of hope for Mexico and in wanting to disrupt the capitalist and dominant political platform. Not only did it envision an Indigenous as President but an Indigenous woman to exist as a citizen of Mexico and represent principal roles in state affairs. It was a redefinition of the Mexican democracy always ruled by the male mestizo political elite.

Impunity

The EZLN's initial demand asked for justice and to list those federal politicians and military officers who have abused their power over the Mexican people. Nevertheless, minimal action was taken in part by the bad government. Indigenous lives are dispensable in the eyes of dominant institutions. There is a legacy of ethnic and gender based violence towards Indigenous women in particular due to the culture of impunity that dominates the government's legal system. A report by Amnesty International estimates a rise in the number of soldiers in Mexico getting away with raping Indigenous women.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Actividades CIG y Vocera, "Palabras De María De Jesús Patricio, Vocera Del Cig, En La Inauguración Del Encuentro De Las Mujeres Del Cni y Cig Con Las Mujeres Que Luchan. 11 De Febrero Del 2018.," Palabras de María de Jesús Patricio, vocera del CIG, en la inauguración del Encuentro de las Mujeres del CNI y CIG con las mujeres que luchan. 11 de febrero del 2018. (Blogger, February 15, 2018), <https://actividadesdelcigysvocera.blogspot.com/2018/02/palabras-de-maria-de-jesus-patricio.html>.

¹⁴⁹ Cultural Survival, "Mexican Military Raping Indigenous Women with Impunity," Cultural Survival, 2018, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/mexican-military-raping-indigenous-women-impunity>.

In June 1994, Ana, Beatriz, Cecilia González Pérez, and their mother Delia Pérez walked across the Mexican Army checkpoint in the *ejido* Jalisco, municipality of Altamirano, when soldiers sexually abused and raped them for two hours. After reporting such unlawful and forcible injury, the courts passed it along to the military jurisdiction, where they denied them justice. The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) denounces such acts as forms of intimidating the three women known in the region as partaking with the EZLN. Indigenous women who are raped are often rejected by their husband and their community. Consequently, this is what happened to the Pérez sister. Once the community heard of the forcible violation, they were rejected and forced to leave. The community feared further repression of the military. In addition, "because of the way in which women are configured in indigenous communities, and the value they place on virginity," the women were ousted.¹⁵⁰

The Zapatista Law & Justice- Lessons and Service

The EZLN justice system has gained a non-Zapatista following. They know true justice will prevail, and some agreements will emerge. The Zapatista justice system is first perceived differently than a form of authoritative control; preferably, it is part of a unit where all community members participate in creating its whole. An elder Tseltal council member name Ernestino says,

“When you are a council member it is necessary to hold authority, not to *be* an authority. And in order to hold authority you must possess patience, respect, and a desire to listen and to learn. It is not your choice to become an authority; it is because the people have chosen you. The people must be respected and not be taken for granted. God, which is also the land, and the people, chose you. There are no authorities without people, and without people there is no life. That is why to govern is to obey.”¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Chiapas Support Committee, “The Mexican Government Apologizes to Indigenous Women Raped by the Army in 1994,” Chiapas Support Committee, October 22, 2019, <https://chiapas-support.org/2019/10/22/the-mexican-government-apologizes-to-indigenous-women-raped-by-the-army-in-1994/>.

¹⁵¹ Mariana Mora, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 2017), pg 189.

Zapatista authority helped reinforce justice and laws enacted throughout the region. Laws are made based on creating equality and fair justice for the community. This is a crucial element for ensuring good living conditions for all members within their autonomous region and assuring land and women's rights.

Minor laws that are broken are given three chances: a warning, the second obligatory community service, and if there is a third offense, she/he will be sent to the *Council of Fair Governance* (CFG). The *Assembly of the Commune* collaborates with the CFG to develop the best solution and deliver a fair decision. If an incident deals with murder, rape, and drug trafficking, the type of punishment typically favors an outcome that better serves the community.¹⁵²

The Zapatista justice system is a transformative approach for responding to violence, harm, and abuse. It ultimately seeks to transform people's behavior rather than inflicting punishment. Its ultimate goal is to deter continual crime and rectify the culprits.

Extractive Economy & Land Defenders

As aforementioned, Indigenous territories harvest some of the world's most extensive biodiversity, becoming some of the prominent people affected by neoliberal, economic, and cultural conditions that situated these zones as colonial contact zones. Indigenous are known to retain deeper connections in areas containing resource-rich territories that extractive capitalism claims such rights over. Due to their vital link to territories and natural resources, the Indigenous fellowship of collective cultural communities tends to increase.

Gómez-Barris highlights the connection between the drastic rise of ecocides, or the murder of land defenders, in Latin America and the Asian Pacific geographies, increasing the

¹⁵²Alex Kostantopoulos, "The Law of the Zapatista: A Presentation about the Laws Passed by Ezln," Transnational Institute of Social Ecology, December 18, 2019, <http://trise.org/2019/12/18/the-law-of-the-zapatista-a-presentation-about-the-laws-passed-by-ezln/>.

formation of new social movements against extractive encroachment. She further explains the three key points that develop in these areas. One is the source of Marx's concept of primitive accumulation and the Indigenous dispossession. Second, their labor force has been manipulated to be cheapened. And third, the dependencies of cheap labor attract such industries to reap profit from gendered and sexed bodies.

Gómez-Barris reports a “three hundred percent increase in the murders of ordinary people defending natural resources from mining, hydroelectric dams, conservation, and pollution...In the Américas, we see the complicity among state, police, and corporate actors in their attempts to violently shut down these land defenders, such as the case of attack dogs and pepper spray used against Indigenous protestors and their allies as they blocked the Dakota oil pipe.”¹⁵³ In addition, the nation-state considers land defenders as national terrorism to manipulate their mistreatment and have the authority to imprison them. Such as the case in Chile when in 1998, Anti-Terrorist Law persecuted land defenders and labeled them criminals.¹⁵⁴ This continually makes it difficult for Indigenous voices to speak up against such destruction.

Women are excluded in significant economic, political, and cultural roles, including labor spheres where significant resource extraction of minerals happens, such as the Corporación Minera de Bolivia (Bolivia Mining Corporation), which demotes women as second-class citizens. Mining has been denoted as a masculine work field, overshadowing the presentation of women and children. Gómez-Barris explains the particularly of “...women and children provide labor to the extractive zone by supporting the heterosexual “mining family” at home, while also working within the slag waste piles that lie just to the south of Cerro Rico, the million-ton heap

¹⁵³ Gómez-Barris Macarena, *The Extractive Zone Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), preface xix.

¹⁵⁴ IBD., pg 71

of the mining sectors wasted material.¹⁵⁵ The exclusion of historical narratives of women in fields of extractive zone reinforces both capitalist and colonial power structures while erasing their resistance.

Another significant example of this intersection between Mother Earth defenders and Indigenous women is that Indigenous women are prime water collectors for their families and are often called water keepers. Many Indigenous women walk great distances to bring backwater. When waterways are threatened, such as when dam projects emerge, Indigenous women become defenders' of waterways, fighting and protecting water sources from harmful environmental damage. An activist wrote from the Zapatista communique,

“...from the privatization of the service, previously in the hands of the State, the piping of rivers for the supply of large industries, which implies the shortage of water for the towns, the contamination of the rivers, the environmental destruction, diseases and death...”¹⁵⁶

Companies, along with governments' help, specifically attack Indigenous land defenders as these are areas where exclusion and discrimination are prominent, and further violence against them tends to cause little disruption. A 2019-2020 annual report prepared by Amnesty International exposed Latin America to be "the most dangerous region in the world for human rights defenders and, in particular, for those who protect the rights to land, territory and the environment. Of the 304 murders worldwide, 23 occurred in Mexico." It additionally examined gender violence to be present as an estimate of 13 percent of land defenders murdered were women.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ IBD., pg 114

¹⁵⁶ Irena Salina, “Proyeccion De ‘Flow: Por El Amor Al Agua’. Rincón Zapatista Zacatecas, ‘El Viejo Antonio’. Miércoles 12, 6pm.” Enlace Zapatista, October 11, 2011, <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2011/10/11/proyeccion-de-flow-por-el-amor-al-agua-rincon-zapatista-zacatecas-el-viejo-antonio-miercoles-12-6pm/>.

¹⁵⁷ Julieta Bugacoff, “Defenders of the Earth: Indigenous Mexican Women Reflect at COP26,” climatetracker, November 12, 2021, <https://climatetracker.org/defenders-of-the-earth-indigenous-mexican-women-reflect-at-cop26/>.

The killing of the fierce Honduran Lenca woman, Berta Cáceres, shows the impact women of color face. Death squads like the ones used in Honduras to murder Cáceres were trained military assassins that carry out the extrajudicial execution of political oppressors. Cáceres was an Indigenous water protector who had won the Goldman award for defending the sacred Gualcarque River that supplied water to many Lenca people.

Author María José Méndez, a professor in political science, offers a descriptive insight into how intersectional feminism emerges from a “systemic analysis of the historical and global entanglements of power” and the force used to instill these power dominions to oppress and threaten many Indigenous women. Méndez uses Hillary Clinton’s memoir, *Hard Choices*, as an example of how power takes priority over advocating for gender equity. The United States government’s power to codify its dominant order destroyed communities of the global south. The US supported military aid and sent advisors to assist dictatorial politics that set up base camps for the Contras. This known right-wing paramilitary organization helped overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces was General Gustavo Álvarez Martínez, a US Army School of the Americas graduate. Honduras also became an active front in the Contra war leading to many Honduran activists’ disappearance. Battalion 316 was a Honduran Death squad from the 1980s trained in CIA and FBI latest surveillance and interrogation methods. “They merged psychological techniques and physical tortures, including electro-shock, freezing temperatures, and suffocation.”¹⁵⁸ It was Honduras’s most notorious death squad.

¹⁵⁸ The Center for Justice & Accountability, “Honduras,” The Center for Justice and Accountability, 2012, <https://cja.org/where-we-work/honduras/>.

Méndez explains, “Neither women’s rights nor human rights were relevant enough to encourage a reconsideration of her “hard choice” in Honduras.” Instead, those same choices facilitated the formation of hydro dams that threatened the lives of the Lenca people and eventually planned the assassination of environmentalist Cáceres. She writes,

“Berta Cáceres’ death was an eerie reminder of the murder of opposition activists in the early 1980s by counterinsurgency death squads. Unlike transition theses that affirm a radical break between dictatorial and democratic periods, she showed us how the structures of terror were never dismantled in Honduras, since, in her words, “those who tortured us in the past are now preaching on national security... Through the words of Berta she said: “I also know I have been persecuted not just for political leadership but also for being a woman, for being Lenca. In this country it’s not the same being a male leader and being a female leader. And that comes with a very heavy weight. I think it may be easier to confront the transnationals and the army than it is to confront the patriarchy, because that we encounter everywhere. Within our own organizations as well. There won’t be justice or democracy, nor will we humanize this society if the patriarchy exists, and even worse if we don’t discuss it in our organizations.”¹⁵⁹

Women in Leadership

Power is retained in communal spaces that allow all to be recognized and integrated. In building their autonomous Caracoles, the women emphasize demanding the *Women’s Revolutionary Law*. In these communities, both women and men strive to follow them. Their ten law are as follow-

First: Women have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in the place and at the level that their capacity and will dictate, without any discrimination based on race, creed, colour, or political affiliation.

Second: Women have the right to work and to receive a just salary.

Third: Women have the right to decide how many children they will have and take care of.

Fourth: Women have the right to participate in community affairs and hold positions of authority if they are freely and democratically elected.

Fifth: Women have the right to primary care with regard to their health and nutrition.

Sixth: Women have the right to education.

¹⁵⁹ María Méndez, “‘The River Told Me’: Rethinking Intersectionality from the World of Berta Cáceres,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 29, no. 1 (February 2018): pp. 7-24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2017.1421981>.

Seventh: Women have the right to choose their partners and not be forced to marry.

Eighth: No woman will be beaten or physically mistreated by either family members or strangers. The crimes of rape and attempted rape will be severely punished.

Ninth: Women can occupy positions of authority in the organization and earn military rank in the revolutionary armed forces.

Tenth: Women have all the rights and obligations set out by the revolutionary laws and regulations.

It has not been an easy feat for Indigenous women and men to advance the *Women's Revolutionary Law* in the Zapatista Caracoles. During a 2013 educational course, the Zapatista recounted the decades past and some of the ways they practice autonomy in daily life. First, gradual steps have been taken regarding obtaining full participation of women in the struggle. In the Caracol II de Oventik, zone Altos de Chiapas, Indigenous women have taken charge of sectors of education, health, and coordinating zones. Women highlight that they do not wish to invert and follow the same oppressive history of Eurocentric patriarchy that has left them in an unfaithful state of poverty. Second, from the Caracol III, La Garrucha, the women claim to have the same rights as men to receive an equal salary because they come from the same Indigenous blood.

Additionally, many of the roles taken by women and men are detached from economic measures of salary in the organization. Investing energy outside these economic institutions is critical for building communities that prosper together rather than an individual person. Moreover, forming deeper connections to the roles that they lead. Third, women have the right to decide how to live in their homes and decide the number of children with their partners. No one forces them to wear contraceptives and have the right to decisions and opinions. In our autonomy, said women from Caracol III, La Garrucha, have the rights to be respected. Before, the bad government would put a lot of bad ideas. It would put women as worthless that had no

right to speak. Fourth, women's right to participate in all community affairs and freely and democratically elect their political representation has been fulfilled in Caracol II, Oventik, Caracol III, La Garrucha, and Caracol V Roberto Barrios. They attest it has been met with La Garrucha claiming that women have the same rights as men. We have the same right to decide on putting specific women in charge in the communities as agents, curators, health promoters, and sexual health reproductive education promoters. Five, women and children have the same right to receive essential health and nutrition. In Caracol V, Roberto Barrios, women go to health promoters to obtain such services; those communities that lack a health house go to the nearby community where there are health houses.

Furthermore, Caracol III, La Garrucha describes the work in the fields to harvest natural food such as corn, beans, coffee, and other essential food to provide them with healthy feeding, especially when expecting their baby. Sixth, according to women, they have the same right to education; in Caracol V, Roberto Barrios, women do not blame themselves or their mothers for not learning to read and write. Nevertheless, they became conscious of how the bad capitalist government manipulated their history and the undervaluing of women. Seven, the rights to choosing their partner and involuntarily being married. Caracol II, Oventik, explains that they were not taken seriously as people who had made decisions before. Women were exchanged for drinks, animals, or money. Now, most parents ask their daughters if they want to get married or whom they wish to marry; this is progress, they say. Eight, in regards to domestic violence, beatings or physical abuse by relatives or strangers and the repercussions of severe punishment for crimes of attempted rape or rape. Women from the Caracol V, Roberto Barrios, say there are still incidents in the community where bad habits still occur because machismo still contaminates their head. Women have to affirm themselves with words of, 'I am stronger, and you have to

respect me.’ The women who have led as authorities have spent time doing work on understanding the talks about abuse, but some have trouble understanding the talks.

Similarly, Caracol III, La Garrucha, recounts they bump into incidents where men do not behave well and make fun of women to fulfill leadership positions. They think it is useless what they are doing; hence violations of mistreatment still cradle a lack of change in them because they are constantly explaining the law of women to violators. Sadly, there were also similar accounts in Caracol IV, Morelia. Nine, women will hold positions of authority in the organization and earn military rank in the revolutionary armed forces. However, some like Caracol V, Roberto Barrios, and the Northern zone have obtained such rights slowly. They have regional compañeras and militia women that participate. Ten, women have all the rights and obligations set out by the revolutionary laws and regulations. Caracol II, Oventik, exemplifies Comandante Ramona’s sacrifice and the efforts she made for all Indigenous women. A woman who did not know how to read, write or speak in Castile but put all her effort in the faith of their organization.¹⁶⁰

The compañeras recognize that the rights and duties of women are not just in the rights to demand them but in building them from a new normative that has re-emerged from the collective process of their autonomy. The collective as a society is significant in the fundamental element of mutual intervention against the individualism that abolishes the rights of both Indigenous women and men. In this form, the hierarchy of gender is not valid as the fight for life and land. Subcomandante Marcos concludes, “... That’s why for us there is no hierarchy of spheres: we do not hold the struggle for land is a priority over the gender struggle... We think instead, that all emphases are necessary...”

¹⁶⁰ Sylvia Marcos, “La Ley Revolucionaria De Mujeres Del Ezln - VientoSur,” 2012, https://vientosur.info/wp-content/uploads/spip/pdf/la_ley_revolucionaria_de_mujeresdecideci.pdf, pg 8.

Justice has long been part of Indigenous peoples' understanding. Colonial power structures and the unfolding of neoliberal economics obscure Indigenous justice and governance. The modern nation-state uses its authority and its specific mechanism of violence to control and retain the economic leverage of products and resources.

Zapatista autonomous community has illustrated clear and logical justice with a redirection of care for the community and its environment that sustain its people. It is overall a holistic approach that considers various aspects of life, emphasizing community integration, reflection, and accountability. As Ernestino clarifies, "...indigenous people already knew how to govern. They had their own authorities and knew how to order and to obey."¹⁶¹

Corporate, state, and non-state actors are targeting women in the context of mega development and extractivist projects. They risk their lives defending their children, community, and their land. Mega extractivist economies use capitalism and heteropatriarchy to further discriminate and exploit the intersect where racism and patriarchal power overlap. It situated itself in areas where women's labor is vulnerable to the manipulation and influences of their reign.

NAFTA, through nation-state authority, is a continuation of disposing of power to Indigenous communities; however, the nation-state authority used a particular method to repress Mayan women in Chiapas. It uses the violence of poverty with abuse, fear, rape, and death as a menace to their community. The extreme myriad of problems that affect the women of the EZLN has developed to the making of the *Women's Revolutionary Law* along with the principles of Zapatismo that allows them to protect their bodies and voices. In these autonomous spaces, *encuentros* for women, such as *The First Zapatista Women's Encuentro* in 2007-2008, showed

¹⁶¹ Mariana Mora, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 2017), pg 187.

unity and support across different worlds. It was an act of decolonization centered on women creating change. The following chapter will discuss some of the fundamental ways the EZLN helps create a wave of solidarity across its nation and geographies.

Chapter 3: *Muchas Luchas Un Solo Corazón* (Many Struggles, One Heart) Solidarity through National and International Support

Our Word is Our Weapon- Building Social Networks

“What matters is our eldest elders who received the word and the silence as a gift in order to know themselves and to touch the heart of the other. Speaking and listening is how true men and women learn to walk. It is the word that gives form to that walk that goes on inside us. It is the word that is the bridge to cross to the other side. Silence is what Power offers our pain in order to make us small. When we are silenced, we remain very much alone. Speaking, we heal the pain. Speaking, we accompany one another. Power uses the word to impose his empire of silence. We use the word to renew ourselves. Power uses silence to hide his crimes. We use silence to listen to one another, to touch one another, to know one another. This is the weapon, brothers and sisters. We say, the word remains. We speak the word. We shout the word. We raise the word and with it break the silence of our people. We kill the silence, by living the word. Let us leave Power alone in what the lie speaks and hushes. Let us join together in the word and the silence which liberate.”¹⁶²

After the Mexican government failed to implement the San Andres Accord of 1994, the Zapatistas opted to change strategies and use words as weapons. It proved to be a much more effective tool than physical war, reaching and uniting many people. By carefully and symbolically using the word and a new avenue of connection (world wide web), the word traveled long distances to reach the hearts and ears of many. The word had been instrumental to the Zapatista as it formed dialogue, and ideas of resistance emerged from those encounters. The word, as they see, is something that can never die. The message will live on to be part of history, passed and captured by the people. Words move and educate the people to take in different ways to resist. These encounters enable the possibility for Indigenous to discuss the crossing of Mayan

¹⁶² Subcomandante Marcos and Juana Ponce de Leon, *Our Word Is Our Weapon: Selected Writings* (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2002). pg. 113.

indigenous worldview to critique dominant political forces, forces of fragile democracy as a consequence of discriminatory origins. As sociologist Eugenia Demuro emphasizes,

“the Zapatistas’ use of the Word is to create the world anew: to name that which has been hitherto subjugated and excluded. The Zapatistas’ discourse imbues “Western” – hegemonic, familiar, hierarchical – forms and customs with “other” – Mayan, multi-ethnic, “traditional”, ancestral – ways of thinking and being. By strategically employing the Word, the Zapatistas reread Western modernity and frame their struggle in historical, political, and literary terms. They achieve this by challenging the monological Western canon, inscribing their own discourses, stories, and myths, and making them legible through a subaltern use of the Word.”¹⁶³

The EZLN used language as a tool to open dialects to critique Western politics. The Zapatistas’ voices became visible, and their presence resonated with Mexico and international discourse. Nationally the Mexican people realized they also suffered scarcity of fertile land, access to health, essential services such as water and infrastructure, proper food, education, and unfair salary. The people wanted stability and a way out of poverty.¹⁶⁴ Internationality, the struggle created a bond of resistance and solidarity against anti-democracy and anti-capitalism. They use words to resist the bad government everywhere in conjunction with crossings of Indigenous consciousness.

Many of the Mexican intellectuals of the time doubted the potential of Indigenous people to organize a successful political action. In 1983 the first clandestine group gathered in the Chiapas Lacandon Jungle. Keenly aware of their land, the Mayans were cognizant of the arrival of *Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional FLN* (National Liberation Forces), a group of Marxist-Leninist university students that hid in the Chiapas Jungles of Lacandona. The encounter with the Indigenous Mayans revolutionized the revolution. As time went on, the revolution

¹⁶³ Eugenia Demuro and Israel Holas Allimant, “Mapping the Interstices: Intertextuality, Language, and Authorial Voice in Zapatista Poetics,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (February 2020): pp. 25-42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14701847.2020.1717110>, pg 26.

¹⁶⁴ George Allen Collier and Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello, *Basta!: Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2005), pg. 64.

shifted. The revolutionary teachers became pupils of the Indigenous, and their broader political consciousness focused on collective wellbeing. There were, of course, many challenges the early years of the organization faced, like navigating through the various Mayan religion and ethnic differences that complicated communications. A 2015 census totals 52 Indigenous languages spoken in Chiapas.¹⁶⁵ The Zapatistas' demonstration to surpass significant obstacles astounded many, and the possibility of change appealed to the Mexican people. They united and demanded change under a critical juncture of Mayan traditions and their collective framing, *Everything for Everyone, Nothing for Ourselves*. In a Zapatista communique titled, "Chiapas: the southeast in two winds, a storm and a prophecy" they thoroughly explained the fruitless outcome of neoliberalism supreme government left the Mayan Indigenous in misery and the merit in,

"Collective work, democratic thought, subjection to the agreement of the majority, are more than a tradition in the indigenous area, they have been the only possibility of survival, resistance, dignity and rebellion. These "bad ideas", in the eyes of landowners and merchants, go against the capitalist precept of "many in the hands of few"."¹⁶⁶

Leftist Movements to National Solidarity

"We form a network through each of our locations where we seek to create a collective voice which serves as a mirror for the life and heartbeat of our mother earth. We form a network of networks through the collectives of collectives which are our communities and regions where we seek to create another collective voice, which we listen to attentively. This voice continues to represent what we have freely decided to be; it represents our permanent struggle and the collective agreement that emerges from our differences. Thus we respect and honor this voice, making it our government not just for today but for always. It is from our differences that we become one as the peoples that we are; that is why we honor our differences."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Indigenous Mexico, "Chiapas: Forever Indigenous," Chiapas: Forever Indigenous - Indigenous Mexico, 2015, <https://indigenousemexico.org/chiapas/chiapas-forever-indigenous/?print=print>.

¹⁶⁶ Department of Press and Propaganda, EZLN, "Chiapas: El Sureste En Dos Vientos, Una Tormenta y Una Profecía," Enlace Zapatista, August 27, 2021,

<https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1994/01/27/chiapas-el-sureste-en-dos-vientos-una-tormenta-y-una-profecia/>.

¹⁶⁷ CIDECI-UNITIERRA, "Declaration from the Second National Assembly of the National Indigenous Congress and the Indigenous Governing Council," Enlace Zapatista, October 18, 2018, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2018/10/18/declaration-from-the-second-national-assembly-of-the-national-indigenous-congress-and-the-indigenous-governing-council/>.

The Zapatistas declare that those who impose predatory laws live the world differently, where everything is a commodity rather than its authenticity of life. They are people who love the land, the mountains, the water, the forests, the birds, and every living being that inhabits Mother Earth. Life is sacred, and for that, they worship life.¹⁶⁸ They feel the pain of Mother Earth and collaboratively see its pain reproduce in the Indigenous people around the world. They are brown, red, yellow, mixed, transgender, gay, non-binary, and poor, but together they are worthy of life, unique and different.

The Zapatistas' national resistance was formed from a collective struggle of Zapatismo that captured both the principles behind its struggle conjointly with the desire to change and imagination of hope. The individualistic notion no longer could divide Mexico's people once they understood that all deserve to be treated like dignified humans. Mutually, the conscious realization that a collective group of people shared structural, cultural, and systematic discrimination awakened the masses of people. The failure to overcome poverty and discrimination was inescapable in an undemocratic structure.

The EZLN's *bottom-up* democratization emphasizes the potential of civil society to sustain power and make a democratic change. The EZLN created a political space where the *representation* of civil society was the only actor that *proposed* and *constructed* democracy. The EZLN *obeyed* and *served* the wishes of its people. To a similar degree, this perspective was compatible with the Latin American left, where unions, Campesinos, collectives, and social justice organizations shared the same visions of equality—merging in one direction, the Indigenous guerrilla movement set up a *National Democratic Convention*.

¹⁶⁸ NATIONAL INDIGENOUS CONGRESS, “Declaration of the Fifth Assembly of the National Indigenous Congress and the Indigenous Governing Council,” Enlace Zapatista, February 6, 2021, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/02/05/declaration-of-the-fifth-assembly-of-the-national-indigenous-congress-and-the-indigenous-governing-council/>.

The National Democratic Convention was a deliberation of the nation's demands for a Mexican National Liberation Movement instead of a state movement. After further capturing the attention of activists and organizers worldwide, in August of 1995, the Zapatista held its *First International Consulta*, allowing Mexicans and all foreigners to participate and vote on the path of the movement. In 2005 the Zapatistas wrote the last declaration named *La Sexta*, which became known otherwise as, *The Other Campaign*. This project continued bringing national and international leftist movements together.¹⁶⁹

In *The Other Campaign* Subcomandante Marcos and other comandantes traveled throughout Mexico, meeting and listening to different groups, critically the most marginalized in society. In this manner, they could resonate with the worlds of many that suffer. Comandanta Dalia summoned all women who suffer as they do to organize and come to action.

“...You told us the pain that you feel as women and there's no difference between your suffering and our own. You told us how you are mistreated by your boss at work. We met with housewives, workers, students, teachers, doctors, nurses, secretaries, sexual workers, day laborers, artists, all sectors of workers... That's why, compañeras, we need to organize – in your own neighborhoods, your own regions; wherever you are, organize.”¹⁷⁰

The Other Campaign was a broad movement that not only focused on equality for women it conjointly worked towards a more just society for all communities. As Comandante Dalia clarified, the issue is not man. It is the unfairness of bad governance. Both men and women struggle, so together, they stand stronger to one day overthrow the evil government and its capitalist system. In the same way, Zapatistas International Solidarity gained traction by filling the hearts of many people with consciousness and raising awareness of the ongoing injustices. In

¹⁶⁹ School for Chiapas, “Zapatista Timeline,” Schools for Chiapas, April 12, 2021, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/teach-chiapas/zapatista-timeline/>.

¹⁷⁰ Hilary Klein, “‘We Learn as We Go’ - Zapatista Women Share Their Experiences,” Toward Freedom, April 13, 2018, <https://towardfreedom.org/story/archives/women/qwe-learn-as-we-goq-zapatista-women-share-their-experiences/>.

support of the Zapatista, the Members of *The Other Campaign* and activists from Chile, Brazil, the Spanish State and Germany declare,

“if they touch the Zapatistas, they touch all of us... We support the right to self-determination that our comrades carry out through the Boards of Good Government; we support their struggle for the defense of their territories and the creation of autonomy. The anger that they transmit to us is far from a call to surrender; on the contrary, their indignation, which actually a large portion of the global population “suffers,” reflects the need to learn from different experiences of struggle, from history, and from the possible creation of solidarity bridges so that acts like the ones they are resisting do not go unpunished and that they feel our support, we who are below and on the left, creating that other possible world together, needed more now than ever,”¹⁷¹

Dignidad, Tierra y Libertad (Dignity, Land & Liberty) International Solidarity

“Maybe we are backwards because we honor the land instead of money. Maybe we are barbaric because we grow our own food and because we work to live and not to make money. Maybe we are inappropriate and inconvenient because we govern ourselves as the people that we are and because we see the work of government as one of the many responsibilities that we as community members must carry out. Maybe we are rebellious because we do not sell out, give up, or surrender. Maybe we are everything that they say about us.”¹⁷²

- The Zapatista Maritime Squadron, known as the “421st Squadron”

In 2021 the Zapatistas sailed to Europe to announce their invasion of reconquering life.

Their mission was not to conquer and dominate as their past invaders had tried to do so with them. Their focus was to speak of their histories and build connections with those fighting to protect land and nature. To show the commonality of people who have not sold out to the corpses of greedy capitalists and are fighting to defend Mother Earth. It renamed Europe the *SLUMIL K'AJXEMK'OP* which means “Rebellious Land” in Tzotzil.¹⁷³

The EZLN was not the first Indigenous movement to organize, but it was one of the first to make its movement known internationally. Their words symbolically transverse through the

¹⁷¹ Gloria Muñoz Ramírez, “‘We Won't Back down,' Assert Zapatistas in Response to a Series of Aggressions,” Americas Program, August 31, 2012,

<https://www.americas.org/we-wont-back-down-assert-zapatistas-in-response-to-a-series-of-aggressions/>.

¹⁷² 421st Squadron, “Only 500 Years Later,” Enlace Zapatista, August 17, 2021,

<https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/08/17/only-500-years-later/>.

¹⁷³ Sup Galeano, “421st Squadron,” Enlace Zapatista, April 21, 2021,

<https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/04/20/421st-squadron/>.

internet. The world listened intently, and the Mexican government could no longer deny their presence as they were attracting solidarity across the globe. The Zapatistas weaved together a social fabric for justice.

In another *Encuentro*, “The Intercontinental Gathering for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism” organized and mobilized a dialogue between international support and civil society. It involved people from forty-four countries, including Japan, Oceania, Iran, South Africa, and the Americas. The visiting delegates offered traditional left expressions of solidarity of chants, raised fists, and multilingual singing of revolutionary songs. The event captured the spirit of optimism as they gathered to show their respect for a movement with so few resources that brought a massive array of people together. The event organized different workshops where the 3,000 people attended could discuss the politics, economy, and culture of anti-capitalist ideas. They divided people between five sites that created the five types of tables (workshops) specific to those topics. During the workshops, participants reflected on the problems and opinions brought up by the table moderators.¹⁷⁴ In this way, Zapatista honed in on specific issues of the people but, importantly, brought them together under one struggle.

The Zapatista autonomous project encourages a network of forums through their struggle. They include *encuentros*, caravans, tours, international consultation, campaigns, collectives, artistic, cinematic, and academic movements. The collisions of these project types with the centering of Zapatismo encourage an extensive network of sharing and listening and empathy and support of international solidarity. Sharing and listening are from the Indigenous tradition of listening with humbleness. They encourage participants to bring their thinking ‘down to Earth’ and prioritize listening in dialogue within forms of encounter, assembly and creation. In the

¹⁷⁴ Andrew Flood, “The Zapatista Intercontinental Gathering for Humanity and against Neo-Liberalism,” Anarchist Writers, 2009, <https://anarchism.pageabode.com/the-zapatista-intercontinental-gathering-for-humanity-and-against-neo-liberalism/>.

encounter, they engaged with each other in a genuinely open and honest way where they intensely got involved in the act of listening. Assemblies were formed through collective decision-making bodies. In this process, power is shared by all who participate and together learn how to create other worlds outside.¹⁷⁵

A primary challenge to advocating for change is shifting and redefining the meaning of power, looking at power from below on the ground in spaces ignored. Power is then exercised through all and in multiple ways, including Mother Earth. In this manner, individual things have power but do not necessarily mean the need to have total control of power. Observing power in all spaces and things, they observe inside and outside, including intersubjective conscious and unconscious contentions of women.

Merging Women's International solidarity and *Otrao*

The 2007 *First Encounter Between the Zapatista Peoples and the Peoples of the World* merges a series of different topics but more specifically dedicated spaces to women's rights and participation. Three thousand participants from Mexico and abroad attended the three-day *Encuentro*. About 200 Zapatista women in their colorful embroidered blouses and hand-woven skirts walked single-file into the auditorium representing each of the five Caracoles.

They spoke of the atrocities they endured at the hands of the elite but, importantly, described the dramatic shift since the Zapatista movement. One of the Zapatista women reiterated, "Before we didn't have any rights; before we were not valued as women," they said again and again. "But now we have rights as women. Now no one can tell us that we don't have rights." The women went on to talk about the decrease in domestic violence and having the

¹⁷⁵ Kelly, "Reflections and Learnings about Zapatismo..." Enlivened Learning, March 21, 2013, <https://enlivenedlearning.com/2013/01/01/reflections-and-learnings-about-zapatismo/>.

power to dictate the number of children to have and not be limited by raising children and working at home. The change in their private sphere impacted their ability to participate in public life. With no longer restricting their lives around their homes, they soon realized they also had the power to govern their autonomy as local and regional representatives. Women spoke of the different ways they could now organize, such as the women's collectives- vegetables, gardens, bread-making collectives, and artisan cooperatives, which allowed them to obtain economic resources and, importantly, give back to their community. It was a catalyst and sequence that retains their movement in motion.

In the collectives, women felt free to express their concerns and listen to others; their fear slowly dissipated. As Zapatista Rosa Isabel, a member of the Production Commission, mentioned, "Working together in the women's collectives is where we get over the fear and embarrassment that we feel. We work together and we're happy working together." They attest that there was some resistance for some men to comprehend how vital their work has been. Nevertheless, a more significant majority of men in leadership encourage the women's forefront; together, they learn as they go and move forward.¹⁷⁶

Illustrating how all suffer in the hands of oppressive governing, the Zapatista Connected with different struggles and gender rebellion. *The Encounter of Women, Trans, Inter, and Nonbinary People at the Zone to Defend (ZAD)* was the first Encuentro in Europe (France's Notre Dame des Landes), and the event was named, "Many struggles to live, one heart to struggle." In France, a movement for the defense of forests and against airports caused an uprising throughout the different regions of France. The Squadron 421 members relayed, "The ZAD is a territory that symbolizes resistance, the defense of the earth and life, and with it the

¹⁷⁶ Hilary Klein, "'We Learn as We Go' - Zapatista Women Share Their Experiences," *Toward Freedom*, April 13, 2018, <https://towardfreedom.org/story/archives/women/qwe-learn-as-we-goq-zapatista-women-share-their-experiences/>.

defense of many forms of life. Their struggle teaches us that without territory there is no autonomy.” The Squadron 421 had sailed across the globe from Mexico to Europe in a long but adventurous journey. They were made up of 7 people- four women, two men, and an *otro*- all Mayan descendants. They significantly set Marijose to disembark and first set foot in Europe. SupGaleano wrote it is a “slap in the face of the hetero-patriarchal left.”¹⁷⁷ Marijose hashed the *Encuentros* purpose, “The reason for this encounter is to provoke a space for sharing, for resonance, but above all, as the Zapatistas say: a space for listening. We have chosen to convene in a mixed way (by choice, open to the dissident community) to dialogue from different feminisms, from our different positions and experiences of struggle, to create what we consider powerful: the connection and construction of networks.” Marijose explained how the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the political context of repression and social control. An increase in “appropriation, dispossession, and exploitation—the typical means of a capitalist colonial system.” Mariajose said,

“it is urgent that we live” quoting the Zapatista theme of differences: “It is urgent we exist by respecting difference, as our Zapatista *compas* put it: ‘When difference encounters another equally significant but distinct difference, it embraces and celebrates it. Difference doesn’t seek a mirror, but rather something much more complex, more human: respect.’ Confronting barbarism can only be done by organizing.”¹⁷⁸

In yet another dialogue, Marijose attended the “Democratic Confederation” that Jinda Nurkah, a Kurdish women combatant, spoke in. Although Kurdish women have supported the Zapatista movement through letters and announcements, this was the first time they had direct communication. Nurkah assured the people that exercising a union of sovereign groups was the way to battle the capitalist monster and the morality which advocates action for happiness. She

¹⁷⁷ SupGaleano, “421st Squadron,” *Enlace Zapatista*, April 21, 2021, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/04/20/421st-squadron/>.

¹⁷⁸ Daliri Oropeza, “Zapatistas, Women, and Gender Dissidents: On the Encounter in Notre Dame Des Landes,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, August 10, 2021, <http://www.cnsjournal.org/zapatistas-women-and-gender-dissidents-on-the-encounter-in-notre-dame-des-landes/>.

insisted that “recovery of ancestral knowledge, autonomy from dominant men, and the transmission of this knowledge for the fight for autonomy” was fundamental to the cause. She assured everyone that “Collectivity is power” and added their Kurdish analogy between ecology and women's rights. “We know that the system dominates nature to increase its power and threatens women's potential.” She continued, “In our Kurdish community, we have a saying: each tree grows on its own land. That's why it's important to know all the struggles. Ours is for territory and that makes ours a universal struggle.”¹⁷⁹

A passion for life, humbleness, and sharing the word based on Zapatismo convinced many across the nation and the globe. Mexicans responded with sympathy to the Zapatistas and supported their search for justice, democracy, and liberty. Abroad Zapatismo inspired other movements to form and became aware of the injustice of anti-democratic capitalism and the commonality that they all struggle with. They understood together they were more potent and demanded the creation of a different type of world, a new world where humanity came first.

Final Conclusion: Those that Live Under the Earth Topple the Tree of Power

“Comandante Samuel then explained how the story defines their struggle, “We are like the tusa, we are the invisible that live under the earth, just like the dead, but slowly, slowly we are chewing away at the roots of power until it comes crashing down. And like the mero kosh, we are born from our death so that we may die and live again. In the wake of their struggle the Mexican people and international movements for justice, peace, liberty, and democracy heard the words of life and the beauty of the possibilities of having a world where all have the right to live it to its fullest.”¹⁸⁰

By analyzing the development of colonial heteronormative patriarchal structures through the EZLN struggle of Indigeneity and Zapatismo, I argue that we can deconstruct the underpinnings of discriminative traditional gender norms. After centuries of erasure and genocide by way of Eurocentric colonial structures of power, control, and hegemony and its

¹⁷⁹ IBD., Oropeza

¹⁸⁰ Mariana Mora, “The EZLN and Indigenous Autonomous Municipalities,” School for Chiapas, April 1998, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Mariana-Mora-Indigenous-Autonomous-Municipalities.pdf>.

development of modernity and nation-state formation, we can recognize the issues and conflict of Indigenous identity. This conflict rejects, transforms and converts their Indigeneity into the other and a social group where they are displaced, marginalized, and pushed into the lower social classes of society. Western modernity reproduces its contemporary perspective of knowledge, education, and intersubjectivity that normalize the oppression of others and, notably, women.

In a global context, the Indigenous struggle has shown the severe predicament of globalization and neoliberalism pursuit of extractivist economies and exploitation of expendable bodies commonly of Indigenous and those most excluded by Eurocentric heteropatriarchy like Indigenous women and non-binary bodies. Consequently, Indigenous women have been most policed, persecuted, and historically abolished by authority (paramilitary and counterinsurgency), becoming the center of the resistance due to the multiple intersections of repression.

The Zapatistas oppose defining bodies based on an economic profit, and through their Indigenous outlook of Zapatismo, they decolonize and fight back. The Zapatistas' initiative of fighting for land and autonomy reclaims their presence. It rekindled their sustainable ways of knowing, building back their education systems, democracy, health, food sovereignty, and the notion of collective wellbeing. Nevertheless, it has essentially dismantled the notion of gender inequality and the subservient role.

The EZLN won the hearts of Mexicans and international solidarity using their language of dignity, justice, and liberty for all. They use their Indigenous culture and symbolic language that puts real meaning and value to their words of a dignified life. Without the rigidity of an authoritative army, the EZLN fights for life, with everything that life is- happiness, love, positivity, and a calling for justice.

In a world that is not monolithic, cultures like the Indigenous have come up with different ways of being that fulfill their innate sense of living in harmony with Mother Earth. Indigenous women have held a unique role in maintaining and protecting Mother Earth from the evil trenches of capitalism. Let us listen to those most excluded, exploited, and expelled from society because they continue to resist and overcome.

To conclude my project and foreshadow my path, I emphasize the need to question those who have power and the intentions they hold. Moreover, study the conscious and unconscious relations we have been indoctrinated with and look for a broader view outside Eurocentric confines. We must resist oppressive structures that divorce the value of all life to exist.

Understanding change is slow, or Zapatistas say, *lento pero avanzando* (slow but advancing); we all advance with every small gesture, question, action, resistance, and defiance of norms that silence, erase, and suppress. By working together as a collective, we can build communities that empower each other no matter gender or race. I predict this is the actual making of human progress when we achieve a world where we all fit. Unity is possible. It is the work of coming together to create change and bring real solutions to the world's problems like climate change. With the collective effort, we can successfully save our humanity and mother earth, so in support of the struggle, we say, *Zapata Vive! La Lucha Sigue!* (Zapata lives! The Struggle Continues!)

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