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## CULTURE, MEDIA & FILM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Toward enacting a Zapatista feminist agenda somewhere in *la Selva Lacondona*: We are all Marias?

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**Abstract:** Women's participation in the Zapatista Revolutionary Movement improved women's potential for gender justice as outlined in the *1994 Declaration of Women's Rights*; however, *Zapatismo* has struggled to implement and sustain a clear indigenous feminist agenda. In this essay, I argue that because The Indigenous Congress of Mexico does not recognize repressive indigenous patriarchal structures and solely blames capitalism and neoliberalism for persistent gendered inequity, women continue to suffer systematic gendered violence and oppression at the hands of their indigenous fathers.

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**Keywords:** Zapatista Revolutionary Movement; Guerillas; Zapatista feminism; Subcomandante Marcos; indigenous rights; NAFTA; capitalism; neoliberalism; Zapatista National Liberation Army; gender justice; UNDRIP

### 1. Introduction

*Zapatismo* claims to position women at the center of its political agenda and articulates *The Participation of Women in the Autonomous Government* in the 10 points of the Women's Revolutionary Law. Yet, implementing these points "... *nos ha costado mucho*"—it has been an uphill battle and the success of a Zapatista Feminist agenda has been mixed. In this essay, I contend that because *Zapatismo* does not recognize indigenous patriarchal oppression in its revolutionary rhetoric and analysis of existing gender relations, women have continued to face systematic oppression. While it is true that capitalism and neoliberalism have wreaked havoc on women's livelihoods heightening oppression and gender violence, it is crucial to recognize traditional patriarchal systems as one of the many constitutive factors in the present subjugation of

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### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Indigenous women of Mexico will continue to be ruled by the will and right of the indigenous father unless they can extricate themselves from the ideological rhetoric that solely blames gender violence, inequity, and reproductive subjugation on *capitalismo y liberalismo*, conquest, and colonization. Women must embrace their historical memory and acknowledge the sexual division of labor and the traditional ontological principles that existed in indigenous communities before conquest and colonization. Moving beyond the mestizo-indigenous binary will enable indigenous women to open spaces for true revolutionary change.

indigenous women's reproductive systems. By casting all socioeconomic, political, and gender inequity on capitalism and neoliberalism, the Indigenous Congress reifies what it proposes to condemn—oppression. Female oppression did not begin and end with capitalism; capitalism and neoliberalism simply intensified preexisting patriarchal systems.

To begin, I provide a brief historical trajectory of the Zapatista movement led by antiliberal, antiglobalization leader Subcomandante Marcos who rallied indigenous communities in Southeastern Mexico to gather their “dignified rage” against the North American Free Trade Agreement and over 500 years of continuous colonial subjugation

(Henck, 2018). I then examine women's participation and organization in the movement to reveal how Zapatista women continue to struggle for gender equity “from within the center” of Zapatista communities. In “listening” to the *testimonios* (testimonies) of Zapatista Women, I dispute Subcomandante Marcos's claim that this examination of female gender justice is “about another feminism: that which comes from above, from the center to the periphery” (Henck, 2018, Loc. 1048). I proffer that Indigenous gendered violence and subordination within the Zapatista *caracoles* (cultural centers) is a persistent problem that demands awareness and remedial justice.

## 2. Historical background

The construction of capitalism as the primary enemy of *Zapatismo* began with the intensification of US economic and political interest in Mexico in the 1990s when it appeared that Mexico was moving toward self-determination and autonomous regulation<sup>1</sup> The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was an economic response to Mexico's movement away from US control (Henck, 2007, 2018; Ramírez, 2008; Ross, 1994, 2009). Zapatistas and indigenous leaders believe that NAFTA's implementation was/is a strategy to secure Mexico's financial dependence and lock it into neoliberal regulations and free trade agreements (Henck, 2018). While Mexico was signing NAFTA, indigenous peoples from Tzeltal, Tzotil, Chol, Tojolabal, Zoque, and other Mayan communities of Chiapas strategically planned their own revolt against these policies—on 1 January 1994, “the same day NAFTA was officially in place” (Ojeda & Hennessy, 2006, p. 7). Under the clandestine umbrella of the Zapatista National Liberation Army [*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación* (EZLN)], approximately 800 indigenous combatants waged war against the Mexican government by taking over San Cristobal de las Casas and its municipal palace, along with the swift occupation of four major municipalities in Chiapas, Mexico (Varese, 2010, p. 268). Claiming they had a legitimate right to resistance under Article 38 of the Mexican Constitution, the *Zapatistas* declared their opposition to NAFTA and hostility to the “undeclared genocidal war against our people by dictators” (Varese, 2010, p. 268).<sup>2</sup>

Indigenous communities considered NAFTA a “death certificate” to its peoples and livelihoods foreseeing the corporate takeover of the food supply. The overall agricultural economy in Mexico has declined 40% since NAFTA was implemented (Wolfwood, 2001, p. 148). Of equal concern was the modification without judicial transparency and civil due processes of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, the legacy of Emiliano Zapata (Henck, 2018; 2007; Ramírez, 2008; Ross, 1994, 2009). Article 27 afforded legal protections of common lands and resources in order to prevent privatization, exploitation, and monopolization by private plantation interests. By the end of the 1990s over half of the Mexican farmland was owned as *ejidos* (village lands). This rapidly changed with the modification of Article 27, which permitted the “privatization of indigenous and peasant collective and communal lands” (Varese, 2010, p. 268). The impact on indigenous livelihoods has been destructive and demoralizing as one indigenous farmer put it: “To take our land is to take our life” (Varese, 2010, p. 268).

NAFTA opened the countryside to agribusiness conglomerates like “American Cynamid, Chevron, Monsanto, and De-Kalb-Pfizer Genetics,” introducing “genetically modified seed, agricultural chemicals and the biopiracy of plant life” in their wake (Ojeda & Hennessy, 2006, p. 7). Its ruinous clutches have spread throughout Mexico, strangling its peoples and ecosystems.

In different ways, both regions have lived the violent impact of neo-liberalism: the invasion of foreign investment, increased production for export, unemployment, migration, increased militarization of communities, the infiltration of drug trafficking, and rampant violation of human rights. And in both regions NAFTA has intensified the scramble for survival. (Ojeda & Hennessy, 2006, p. 135)

In an informal gathering of delegates from Global Exchange and Sipaz in San Cristobal de las Casas on 5 August 2014, Miguel Picard, former advocate for the Center for Investigation and Popular Education, spoke on the impact of NAFTA remarking that NAFTA and neoliberal policies have destroyed local peasant and indigenous farmers who cannot compete with US agribusiness who introduce their products on the market at surplus dumping prices.<sup>3</sup> The result is that local farmers cannot compete and consequently cannot sell their crops (Henck, 2018, loc. 114). This has indubitably been the case with US subsidized corn, which has wreaked havoc on local corn farmers forcing many to switch from corn, a traditional staple to other crop production, entangling women in the daily struggle to feed their families. The outrage against the takeover of indigenous lands and livelihoods precipitated by 520 years of exploitation and expansion fuels the Zapatista Movement and their concerns for ethnic self-determination, sovereignty, and autonomy. According to Miguel Picard, Zapatistas have successfully secured a geopolitical and conceptual space to live and move forward outside the dominant neoliberal paradigm. He repeats similar rhetoric that because the Mexican government has folded to transnational agribusinesses, indigenous populations have suffered, their autonomous structures weakened. As one indigenous leader said:

We have to cut ourselves off from everything. No, we are not going to let ourselves be bribed with a subsidy, with some tin roofs for our homes. No, we have to cut ourselves off from all of this because we know that it is destructive of the independent movements. (Ojeda & Hennessy, 2006, NAFTA p. 165)

The rhetoric against corrupt government systems that suffocate indigenous self-determination and autonomy is still the armor worn by the Zapatistas who face relentless attacks by the government and paramilitaries turning some parts of Chiapas into oppressive police states. Although on 16 February 1996, the Zapatista and the Mexican Government reached an agreement in The San Andrés Accords stipulating to some of their demands for self-determination, self-autonomy, recognition, and promotion of Indian peoples and their knowledges, the federal government has failed to live up to its part of the agreement (Henck, 2018). The efforts of the Accords birthed the National Indigenous Congress bringing together a wide spectrum of indigenous peoples to share their common independence outside governmental structures, its central focus to facilitate the government's specific performance of the San Andrés Accords. In 2001, *Comandante* (Commander) Esther, acting spokeswoman for the Zapatistas, demanded adherence to The San Andrés Accords leading the *March the Color of the Earth to Mexico City*.

The failure of the San Andrés Accords forced the Zapatistas to forge another path toward autonomous sovereignty. In the *Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, the Zapatistas realized that politicians from PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), PAN (National Action Party), and PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) did not recognize indigenous rights and sovereignty (Henck, 2018, loc. 194). Subcomandante Marcos subsequently launched the "Other Campaign" coinciding with the 2006 Presidential campaign, which gave PAN Candidate Felipe Calderón a controversial win over PRD candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador. The "Other Campaign" coined by Marcos as "The National Campaign with Another Politics for a National Program of Leftwing Struggle and for a New Constitution," was a sociopolitical tactic to appeal and reach out to the "humble" people from below—the politically marginalized and those who aligned themselves with the "humble" and marginalized (Henck, 2018, Loc. 203–206). According to Marcos, democracy supersedes rigged periodic elections like "the Mexican elections of 1988, 2006, and 2012" (Henck, 2018, Loc. 214–217).

In his May 2015 communiqué, Marcos, writing under the pseudonym of the slain indigenous leader and organizer, Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, establishes the importance of assuming cargo (responsibility) for all peoples that have been slain or disappeared under the Mexican government. He adds new names “to the already long experience of terror”—the 43 male students that disappeared in September 2014 from Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers’ College in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico (Galeano, 2015). While Galeano claims that the reality of Zapatismo is a “struggle” against the effects of capitalism and neoliberalism, it is also a struggle against greed, political corruption, and specific gendered violence from within and without the Zapatista world.

### 3. Women’s participation

Sadly, women and children bare the lived reality of land and resource dispossession. The intensification of multinational foreign interests have invaded previous communal spaces and collapsed family livelihoods. *Comandanta* Ester’s 2001 declaration in Mexico City succinctly affirms how women are caught in a complex gendered, socioeconomic triple bind, “because we are poor, because we are indigenous, and because we are women” (Klein, 2015, pp. 140–141). Ester’s declaration details the lived experience from childbirth to childrearing, a daily 20-hour workload of laundry, cooking, and hauling water from water sources 3 hours away (Ruis, 2012, p. 216). While Esther emphasized how women’s “daily actions—carrying, caring, and resisting—had transformed them from being victims to leaders,” women’s concerns have forever been submerged in the rhetoric of *neoliberalismo y capitalismo* (Ruis, 2012, p. 216).<sup>4</sup>

The subjugation of poor, marginalized, and indigenous peoples enabled Zapatista Leader and Spokesman *Subcomandante* Marcos to “interpellate” and hail: “Hey, you there!” to the poorest of the poor, the poor and hungry women, the rich color of soil.<sup>5</sup> “Hey, you there”; gather your dignified rage (Althusser, 2001, p. 118). Marcos gathers the rage, but not against traditional machismo behaviors that have kept indigenous women in a complicated subordinate status for centuries, but against capitalism y neoliberalism—the death sentence to all indigenous livelihoods. The rhetoric of *Zapatismo* targets *capitalismo* for the 520 years of female subjugation as it “was born of the blood of our peoples and the millions of our brothers and sisters who died during the European invasion” (National Indigenous Congress, 2014).<sup>6</sup> This Althusserian strategy reinforces that both indigenous men and women are “always-already a subject, even before he (she) is born, is [...] the plain reality, accessible to everyone and not a paradox at all” (Althusser, 2001, p. 119). The power of *Zapatismo* to divert the responsibility of traditional *machismo* for the persistent subjugation of women is noteworthy. The fact that women do not charge traditional patriarchal structures for their individual oppressions demonstrates the power of *Zapatismo* to construct ideology, and the power of ideology itself.

It becomes apparent that the Zapatista’s ability to interpolate women by rearticulating feminist ideology of gender equality was a masterful strategy to recruit women into the revolutionary fold and attract both indigenous and Western support. Elena Poniatowska argues that Major Susana established the first feminist agenda in March of 1993 when she was tasked with recruiting women into the revolution (Hayden, 2002, p. 55). *Comandanta* Susana and *Comandanta* Romona traveled throughout the communities and villages to dialogue with the women and appeal to women’s real needs. In Major Susana’s battle cry for gender justice she asserts:

We do not wish to be obliged to marry someone we don’t love. We want to have as many children we want and can care for. We want the right to a position in a community. We want the right to say what we think and have it be respected. We want the right to study and even be truck drivers. (Hayden, 2002, p. 55)

The demand for gender equality appealed to women’s needs and concerns and became part of the 1994 Women’s Revolutionary Law.<sup>7</sup> Zapatistas purported to provide a new reality of respect, dignity, and protection from gender violence for indigenous women. *Subcomandante* Marcos rearticulates the collective feminist rhetoric voiced by Major Susana:

Here in the Zapatista Army, the penalty for rape is death. A man who rapes a woman is sentenced to death by firing squad. Fortunately, we have not yet had to send anyone to be shot. Zapatista women can choose the man they want to marry. Before, they were the ones chosen. They have the right to control their bodies, and use a variety of methods of contraception[s] ... (Hayden, 2002, p. 381)

Unfortunately these feminist declarations have done little to change how “Macho Mexican justice deals with women, especially poor women who have had not access to an education” (Hayden, 2002, p. 57).<sup>8</sup> Pontiatowskwa notes how women have been braced in a borderland position between Cortez’s mistress, *Malinche* and the *Virgin de Guadalupe*. *Machismo* existed before capitalism. According to feminist journalist María Victoria Llamas, “Mexican women still struggle for respect. Even the guerilla women in Chiapas are victims of their men’s macho’s attitudes” (Hayden, 2002, p. 55).<sup>9</sup>

Indigenous feminist scholar Sylvia Marcos’s July 2014 report on “The Zapatista Women’s Revolutionary Law as it is Lived Today” suggests that *Zapatismo* has kept an “emphasis” on its feminist agenda as it is delineated in the Revolutionary Law. While according to Subcomandante Marcos Sylvia Marcos is a “serious researcher,” there is substantive testimony from Zapatista *compañeras* (comrades) that suggest women still struggle within a patriarchal paradigm of subordinate positions (Henck, 2018, loc. 1496). In Sylvia Marcos’s 2014 analysis of “Participation of Women in Autonomous Government: First-Grade Textbook for the Course ‘Freedom According to the Zapatistas,’” the Women’s Law escapes any rigid framework. It proposes and resolves some practical feminist demands, such as women’s “empowerment” and the advancement of women’s “reproductive rights” (Marcos, 2014). Her assessment infers that women’s “sexual and reproductive rights” have been transformed “under the aegis of Zapatista autonomy,” and “permeated by collective identity, interdependence, and inter-relatedness” (Marcos, 2014).

After reading these same *testimonios*, it seems that Sylvia Marcos’s analysis represents a comparable ideology to *Zapatismo*: “We are equal because we are different.” Sylvia Marcos argues that “It broadens all referents, expands them, transgresses them, and joins them ‘illogically’ with its practices of inclusion[n] ...” In this “illogical” transformative process, which “transgresses” all logic, Sylvia Marcos advances a new direction forged outside categorization; albeit, she admits *Zapatismo* shares Platonic essences of “... [r]eproductive rights, and sometimes like an elaboration of gender racialization in all its complex theorizations.” Female Marcos appears to be rearticulating male Marcos’s interpretation of “Zapatista women’s history” in which he argues that, “... all categorical options are a trap ... The answer is neither here nor there. It is better to make a new path that goes where one wants to go” (Marcos, 2014).

On further interrogation, it seems that this postmodern rhetoric itself is a trap to ensnare indigenous women at the precarious precipice of the “here” and “there” forever hanging in the rhetorical air. In this social media-manipulated world, Zapatistas are drilled in the rhetoric of the atrocities of *capitalismo*—a reductive red herring to maintain machismo privilege.<sup>10</sup> In other words, casting the sole blame for women’s subordination on capitalism and neoliberalism, two words uttered over and over as if it were a mantra during the 2014 Indigenous Congress, *Zapatismo* reifies what it proposes to condemn—oppression. This one-dimensional approach overlooks the sale of Coca-Cola, water bottles, *chickles*, candy, chips, Zapatista tea shirts, and other food and goods that were sold during the event. Nor does it consider the deployment of children as young as two years of age selling their *curios* during the Congress. “The oppression of women, after all, did not begin with capitalism. What began with capitalism was the more intense exploitation of women and the possibility at last of their liberation” (Dalla Costa, 1971).<sup>11</sup>

Although Marcos concedes that in the initial stages of the movement, “bosses” mistreated and raped their women, he appears to attribute all later discourse of gender-specific violence, gender subordination, and other gendered inequities against indigenous women as alien feminist

propaganda and subterfuge to dismantle Zapatista communities (Henck, 2018, Loc. 2385–2387). Marcos declares:

In the first few months after beginning our uprising, a group of feminists (that's what they called themselves) came to some of the Zapatista communities. No, no they did not come to ask, to listen, to understand, to respect. They came to say what the Zapatista women should do, they came to free them from the oppression of Zapatista machos (beginning, of course, by freeing them from Marcos), to tell them what their rights were—to give orders, that is. (Henck, 2018, loc. 1054–1055)

Marcos refers to an “initial failed encounter” of “unseen confrontation” between women and feminists, which he claims feminists attribute to the “EZLN's vertical and militaristic machismo” (Henck, 2018, 1061–1064).

While Marcos contends that “gender struggles” within the Zapatista communities are western feminist impositions, Eloísa (Former Member of the *Junta de Buen Gobierno MAREZ San Pedro Michoacán*) suggests otherwise. “When we were under the rule of our fathers they did not give us that freedom to go out well the machismo that was lived before was great.<sup>12</sup> Maybe is not because the *compañeros* wanted it to be like this, but because they had the idea that capitalism itself or the system itself put in our heads” (First Grade Textbook, 2013, p. 6).<sup>13</sup> Eloísa articulates that indigenous women's reproductive subjugation under machismo was “great” acknowledging preexisting traditional patriarchal systems of subordination in which “*compañeras* lived under the rule of their fathers” (First Grade Textbook, 2013, p. 6). She then links the intensification to Spanish colonization and the introduction of private property interests.

Hillary Klein's (2015) *Compañeras* makes a slight reference to this as “a historical oversimplification that patriarchy and its sexist practices were introduced into their communities by colonialism, and are not an intrinsic part of indigenous culture” (loc. 3600). Yet, it is precisely because *Zapatismo* did not and does not include indigenous patriarchal oppression in its revolutionary rhetoric and analysis of existing gender relations that women still face systematic oppression. The euphemistic language of “oversimplification” to investigate female subordination and scrutinize privileged patriarchal agenda furthers a distorted factual accounting in the recording of historical memory.

Capitalism is not, as Subcomandante Marcos proclaims, solely “responsible” for gendered injustice within Zapatista communities. It is certainly true that capitalism and neoliberalism have wreaked havoc on women's livelihoods heightening oppression and gender violence; yet, it is also crucial to recognize that traditional patriarchal systems are one of the most prominent constitutive factors in the present subjugation of women's reproductive systems. Isabel's testimony given to Klein evidences how male privilege is still a dominant factor in Zapatista communities:

Maybe there's resistance and men don't want to change. I won't say that men don't take women into account—they do. But it's as if men have set a limit, “up to here.” When a woman makes a decision, if it's not in the men's interest, they will override her decision. It's their way of saying, “You're not really in charge—we're still in charge here.” If the women in the community suggest something and it's convenient for the men, they will agree to it. But if the men don't like it, they will put a stop to it. They continue on with their own plans, with their own rules. They rip our ideas apart and throw them out, and do whatever they want. We are left standing to one side, like spectators, watching to see what the men will do, and feeling like they don't want something that is truly fair just, and so—there we are! With no power and with the men still in charge. But when they need us to be part of the struggle, for example to confront the soldiers or some other danger, well, then they have to accept that they need us. They call us and say, “We need you to do this.” (Klein, 2015, Loc. 3631–33)

Klein's own research and testimonies provide concrete and convincing evidence of how patriarchal agendas undermine women's emancipation. The restrained political commentary to condemn traditional patriarchy for persistent sexual abuse and reproductive control is clear upon listening to the voices of other women who struggle to reconcile the gap between the 1994 *Declaration of Women's Rights* with *la realidad* (reality) of their present reproductive conditions.

For example in describing the domestic division of labor, Nabil (Member of the Autonomous Council. MAREZ Tierra y Libertad) observes how women with large numbers of children have a difficult time "when in the family the *compañero* did not take the responsibility of caring for the children in the moment which the *compañera* left and went to realize the work" (First Grade Textbook, 2013, p. 9). Yolanda (Education Promoter. MAREZ Magdalena de la Paz) from Oventik, Caracol II, notes that women have not achieved equal domestic contributions in her zone. According to Yolanda, "I think that in all the five *caracoles*, still this is not being fulfilled because we have still not been able to achieve that there be a wage within the organization, there is not" (First Grade Textbook, 2013, p. 25). In a discussion between the *compañeras* of Caracol IV, Morelia, an unnamed *compañera* describes lack of "moral support from her *compañero*" (First Grade Textbook, 2013, p. 57). She describes the difficulty of leaving her family to attend meetings:

The *compañera* has to make tortillas so that she leaves it for her child, she has to get tortillas to take it where she is going, and we see that the little children are those who eat more; if you go four days to the meeting and you leave two baskets of tortillas it is not enough for the child, worse if they are very little they eat more, every while they eat; the youth eat less because they go out to work and carry their *pozol*, but the children no, it is very different. It is worse still if it is that the *compa* does not support per se, the *compa* arrives, the *compañera* just arrived, she is still cleaning their house, she is making their fire, food for the *compa*, and what if the *compa* arrives already angry. "Give me my food quickly," he arrives to say to the *compañera* who just arrived from doing her work. (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 57)

Conceptually, *Zapatismo* promotes the idea of women's participation in the various levels of autonomous governance. The Revolutionary Women's Laws establish equitable relations between men and women, granting women access to participate and rule in the *Buen Gobierno* (Ruis, 2012, p. 215). Yet, the empirical evidence suggests that some women who do participate come home to a second shift of domestic demands from both children and husband. In order to participate, women have had to make gender adjustments "small changes that are enacted" in their specific locals and situation (Hennessy, 2011, p. 183). Within the shifting context of government participation and domestic work, *compañeras* have had to revise their daily routines in order to participate.<sup>14</sup>

In reference to the "Exercise of the Revolutionary Women's Law" concerning gender violence, although some strides have been made, it appears that this declaration has also come short of its complete eradication. Declaration Eight states: "No woman will be beaten or physically mistreated by family members or by strangers. The crimes of attempted rape or rape will be punished severely" (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 27). According to Guadalupe an education promoter from the Monterey Region, from Caracol Oventik, "We say that it has not been completely fulfilled because physical violence is not the only thing that takes place, there are other types of mistreatment" (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 25). The other type of violence Guadalupe describes is physical battery and rape both outside and inside the Caracol "by the party- members" (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 25). Roberto Barios explains that "there are case(s) which still happen in our communities because is the bad custom that there is in one's head, that it is contaminated, *machismo* exists still. 'I am stronger and you have to respect me,' those words still exist many times with our support base *compañeros*" (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 69). Several other *compañeras* suggest that the gender violence is still persistent.

One such case reported by Marisol entails a "huge fucker" with two wives who hung one of his wives "by her feet upside-down and he beat her there, the same together with two more of their

children, and we had to see that arrangement” (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 14). In this case, apparently the *compañeras* were granted a divorce and the “fucker’s” goods were divided up. The *compañera* asked for separation, “so we did it dividing up the goods of the man,” which is how they “gave it solution” (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 14). Although in the telling of this story redistributive justice was meted out, the “fucker” apparently did not receive retributive justice for the violence committed.

In terms of reproductive rights, and the Third Declaration that “Women have the right to decide the number of children that they can have and care for,” Yolanda from *Caracol II* observes: “We see still that it is not being fulfilled much, we are fulfilling it a little, there are some families who already decide how many they can take care of, how many they can have. In these points we are advancing a little, a little is still lacking, there are women who have a ton of children still” (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 25). Yolanda acknowledges that reproductive choice has a political element, as “it is through the politics that the regional representatives give us” (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 25). In discussing family planning, Marisol clarifies the family planning agenda in that it “does not mean that they are not going to have children, but that within the couple they plan how many children” (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 12). Marisol expresses the concern of some of the *compañeros* and *compañeras* that choice is not about the prohibition of children, “but really they are being told to plan, that is why it called planning” (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 16).

Ana (Education Trainer. MAREZ El Trabajo) acknowledges that family planning caused great consternation between some of the community members, as especially there “were some *compañeros* who did not like this. Why am I going to decide? Why is she just going to decide how many children I am going to have? What God sends is what I am going to have” (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 67). Some of the *compañeros* voiced concerns about the procreation of children to maintain “militiamen” and “students” (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 67). They perceive forced planning as a blight on educational development pointing to government preschools whose buildings “are empty, there are few students with them because they are forced to plan” (First-Grade Textbook for the Course, 2013, p. 67).

Under the 1994 Declaration “women have the right to decide the number of children they have and care for.” Women in the *caracoles* are taught about feminine hygiene and contraception and according to Marcos’s 11 May 1994 interview “somewhere in *la Selva Lacondona*, “The *compañera* not only has the right to terminate pregnancy, but the organization has the obligation to provide the means for to do it with total safety.” Marcos’s platform on women’s health care is one of the motives behind women’s participation in the revolution; however, in “First-Grade Textbook for the Course ‘Freedom According to the Zapatistas,’” (2013) there is *not* one mention of abortion—its rhetorical absence a powerful indicator of its implementation within the *Zapatista* health clinics.

Instead, abortion seems to be replaced with traditional family planning rhetoric of spacing births out every five years. Marcos claims that because many of the women are young they have a hard time with most types of contraception. “The pill or the patch or the implant are bad for them, and the IUD too” (Henck, 2018, loc. 3529). He acknowledges the many problems associated with maintaining female healthy reproductive hygiene. He asserts that *companeras* often get vaginal diseases like urinary tract infections from male partners who refuse to “take the treatment they receive” (Henck, 2018, loc. 3529). The result is a cyclical pattern of reinfection, because “men refuse to wear condoms” (Henck, 2018, loc. 3529).

The Oventic, Chiapas sharing of the five councils of *Buen Gobierno* held six sessions in December 30 to 2 January 2007 to address women’s reproductive health issues, as well as other topics. According to a *compañera* on the panel, “The practice of abortion is neither endorsed nor condemned in Zapatista territory, but arises in situations that are best avoided by preventative measures and education. ‘Women don’t practice [abortion], nor do they search it out. Moreover,

it is more a matter due to the circumstances that result in spontaneous abortions” (Villarreal, 2007, n.p.).<sup>15</sup> Ginna Villarreal’s 2007 observation rearticulates *zapatismo* and its perceptions of reproductive justice in “that some of the main hurdles to women’s health remain set by a system of patriarchy left as inheritance by a Spanish conquest” (Villarreal, 2007). According to Chiapas Sipaz official Marina Pages’s (Personal communication to pages, 10 October 2014) statement regarding abortion:

We don’t know if they practice it in *Caracoles* but the fact remains that in Chiapas, as a whole, abortions are prohibited and illegal unless the pregnancy resulted from rape, if the fetus has a malformation, or the life of the mother is at risk. So, if they practice abortions, they won’t mention it publicly giving to the State, yet another reason/pretext to]harass them. As far as we are aware of, you can obtain abortions legally only in Mexico Federal District. Regarding birth control yes there are programs in all the *Caracoles* as far as we are aware of. (October 2014)

As the Zapatista women testify, reproduction health and emancipation is still a daily struggle. Linking persistent reproductive subjugation to solely Colonial Conquest is a form of ideological subterfuge, which suppresses and overpowers honest discussions of indigenous patriarchal systems that privilege masculinity. *Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos* is correct: “It was words that created us. They shaped us, and spread their lines to control us.”

In discerning the ability to sustain a feminist agenda within the Zapatista Revolutionary Movement, it is hard *not* to question whether or not women have reverted back to previous patriarchal reproductive control. Evidence clearly suggests that women have had to pick up their previous domestic roles in tending to family demands without the help of their male counterparts. Hansen and Ryan (2007) argue that “Women’s involvement in the movement increased their potential for equality, but it could not wholly overcome deeply embedded gendered beliefs that women were abandoning their true womanly calling of needing to care for their families” (p. 11).

While it is true that Marcos’s knowledge, vision, platform, and ability to engage the media enabled the people the color of the earth to say “We are all Marcos,” instead of “We are all Marias,” it cannot be denied that his inclusive ideological hail to the people from below inspired a successful revolutionary movement. It is also true that contradictions and unresolved tensions remain between rhetoric and practice. Marcos’s acknowledges these chronic contradictions in his 2004 communiqué “Two Shortcomings,” remarking: “Even though Zapatista women have had a fundamental role in the resistance, respect for their rights is still, in some cases, just a declaration on paper” (Klein, 2015, Loc. 3720). Honest in his communiqué, he concedes that he doesn’t have “a positive report to share with regards to women—in creating conditions for their development, or in a new culture that would acknowledge women’s skills and talents, ones that are supposedly exclusive to men” (Klein, 2015, Loc. 3724).

#### 4. Conclusion

Implementing autonomous good government is complicated and raises the questions: Autonomous for whom? Have declarations of autonomy changed women’s lived experiences and reproductive rights? Although I have argued that gender equality has been privileged in early revolutionary rhetoric to “hail” subjective forces (especially women) to pick up a gun and join the revolution, they have been subsequently subordinated to other ideological mandates. While EZLN’s rhetoric recognizes how cultural patriarchy is ingrained in indigenous society, women still struggle against its impositions. Since the initial Zapatista uprising in 1994, “little has changed for women outside of the intimate circle of EZLN leaders” (Hansen & Ryan, 2007, n.p).

While Hardt and Negri (2001) observe that Zapatista “politics does not rest on a fixed identity,” it still appears that *machismo* is as fixed as ever (Loc. 1261). Notions of “antimodernity” and “altermodernity” are still framed in patriarchy, tradition or otherwise. Until Zapatista notions of

“altermodernity” include an *implemented* indigenous feminism of reproductive justice and equality then “antimodernity” and “altermodernity” are one in the same: female subordination.

Arguably today, *Zapatismo* engages in self-reflection to examine its contradictions. *Zapatismo* openly discusses the gaps between political ideals and social practice. Women’s spaces for discussion have commenced to reflect and contribute discourses on the fissures in which many women still stumble. Critical reflection of whether previous political declarations on gender equality have been achieved is a crucial step toward reproductive justice. These female spaces open pathways for positive change. Still, more must be done.

Unless indigenous women can extricate themselves from the ideological rhetoric that *solely* blames gender violence, inequity, and reproductive subjugation on *capitalismo y liberalismo*, conquest, and colonization, subaltern women will continue to be ruled by the will and right of the indigenous father. Women must embrace their historical memory and acknowledge the sexual division of labor and the traditional ontological principles that existed in indigenous communities before conquest and colonization. Moving beyond the mestizo-indigenous binary will enable women to open spaces for true revolutionary change. Indigenous Gender equality must be more than rhetoric “hails” to justice, and certainly more than a two decade long continuous dialogue. Active engagement of the equal distribution of political power must be met with social action (Randall, 2004, p. 200).

*Postscript:* In Subcomandante Marcos 2013 admission communiqué for students to the Little School, he asks of prospective students:

Would you attend a school taught by indigenous teachers, whose mother tongue is typified as “dialect”? Could you overcome the temptation to study them as anthropological subjects, psychological subjects, subjects of law or esoterism, or history? Would you overcome the urge to write a report, interview them, tell them your opinion, give them advice, orders? Would you see them, that is to say, would you listen to them?<sup>16</sup>

These same political ruminations need to be taken up by indigenous leaders in examining the dialectical dance of power between political listener and political receiver in which *listening* is a reconceptualized and transformative process of redistributive justice and meaning making for all. We must all listen to each other. Speaking and listening brought about the adoption of the 2007 United Nations *Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). UNDRIP specifically stipulates in Article 24 that Indigenous women have the right to traditional medicines and health care and to “all social and health services” as well as the “highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.” Article 7 stipulates that indigenous people have a collective right to live “free of violence,” and under Article 22, “enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.”

Certainly, *political listening from below* embraces the need of Zapatista leaders to recognize the failure in many instances to provide adequate health care to women.<sup>17</sup> *Political listening from below*, moreover, demands recognition of systematic gendered violence and oppression within the Zapatista ranks and the fiduciary duty to remedy gender violence and injustice. *Political listening from below and above* must jointly scrutinize women’s social, political, and reproductive agency within the combatant trenches of the Zapatista communities. *Political listening* has the rhetorical power to unveil the gendered structure of patriarchal institutions that obstructs gender equality and reproductive justice. Zapatistas must recognize these patriarchal indigenous structures in order to truly implement the 1994 *Declaration of Women’s Rights* as well as 2007 *Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

The Zapatistas have acknowledged their continual struggle to eradicate gendered inequities and promote gender justice; now, they must do so. Perhaps, it is here on a localized regional basis, one

female combatant's voice at a time, that women's voices can rise in *equal* global unison to maintain sustainable and equitable indigenous livelihoods.

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#### Notes

1. *Zapatismo* is a concept that developed in 1994 after the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement when indigenous peoples including Ch'ol, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tojolobal, Mam, and Zoque revolted in an armed insurrection in Chiapas, Mexico.
2. Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution bestows public power with the original peoples, in which the right to change their government structures lies with the people (EZLN 50).
3. Miguel Picard also spoke informally about the impact of the World Bank and the International Money Fund as well as the devaluation of the peso as contributing factors.
4. *Neoliberalismo y capitalismo* translates to neoliberalism and capitalism.
5. Marcos's real name is Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, who then changed his name to Galeano.
6. I, along with other members of the Alternative Media from Global Exchange, camped out at this Congress in La Realidad, Chiapas, Mexico.
7. Revolutionary Laws of the Zapatista Women (*written someplace in the jungle, March, 1996*) Taken from Lea Clayton, Prism Mexico correspondence. "These laws (excerpted) are designed to be enforced inside the rebel communities as a semi-official working code to enable the liberation of the indigenous woman:"
  - (1) The women have the right to be respected within family life and within the community.
  - (2) The women have the same rights as men in the community and municipality.
  - (3) The married women have the right to use family planning methods-natural or artificial-whichever they decide. The man has to agree with her decision.
  - (4) The women have the right to participate in meetings and in the decision-making process, without criticism. The women have the right ... to hold office. ...
  - (5) The Revolutionary Law strictly prohibits the sale, cultivation and consumption of drugs, marijuana, poppy, cocaine, etc.
  - (6) The sale and consumption of alcoholic drinks in our towns and communities is strictly prohibited because we are those who suffer most the bruises, poverty and misery as a consequence of this vice.
  - (7) The women and their children will have equal rights to the men in the health, clothing, expense, etc. and the maintenance of family economic resources.
- (8) We, the women, have the right to rest when we really need it, be it because we are tired or sick or because we need to achieve other tasks.
- (9) We have the right to defend ourselves verbally when we are offended or attacked in words by the family or others.
- (10) We have the right to physically defend ourselves when we are attacked or aggravated by families or others, and we have the right to punish the men or person who aggravates, abandons and insults the women.
- (11) The women have the right to demand that the bad customs that affect our physical and emotional health are changed; those who discriminate against, mock or abuse the women will be punished.
- (12) The Revolutionary Law prohibits the abandonment of one's spouse without reason ... or uniting with another man or woman when there hasn't been a normal divorce.
- (13) The Revolutionary Law prohibits a man to have two women because this practice hurts the wives' feelings, violates her rights and injures her dignity as wife and as woman.
- (14) The Law reclaims and considers valid indigenous societal norms. It is prohibited for some member of society to have amorous relations outside of community rules. In other words, men and women may not have relations without being married because this carries as consequence the destruction of the family and is a bad example to society.
- (15) No woman will be mistreated, insulted, or physically abused by her husband for not having male children.
- (16) In case of marital separation, the land and all family possessions are divided into equal parts between husband, wife and children.
- (17) Women have the right to punish men who sell and take alcoholic drinks and drugs.
- (18) Single women have the right of being respected and considered as a family.
- (19) The woman has the right to support from the husband when she is organizing, and when women go to meetings, men will watch and feed the children and tend the hearth.

The woman has the right to demand the eradication of prostitution in the communities.
8. Feminist journalist Maria Victoria Llamas says this on the occasion of the trial of Claudia Rodriguez who shot and killed a man who tried to rape her. She served only a year and 11 days for this crime.
9. Daisy Zamora details similar experiences in Chapter Three on Randall.
10. From August 9 to 10 August, I heard the word the *capitalismo* repeated innumerable times.
11. Jon McGee and Belisa González explore traditional gender roles and cosmology in the Lacondon jungle paying particular notice to Gary H. Gossen's work with the Tzotzil-speaking Mayans. In these

indigenous spaces women's "work space" is limited to a home in which she "sits on the floor while the men and boys in her family sit on small stool[s]..." (179). The Chiapas Tzeltal Maya further practice gender divisions within their reproductive and productive structures. Stereotypical gender roles are reinforced by Lacondon cosmology and mythology (180). See McGee and González (1999).

12. *Junta de Buen Gobierno* translates to Good Government Committee.
13. All translations from the First Grade Textbook on Participation of Women in Autonomous Government is executed by Zapatista Editorial Staff.
14. I argue that many of these "gender adjustments" have placed a toilsome burden on women—the term itself being euphemistic for the myriad ways women have had to "adjust" to more and more work.
15. Villarreal supports my own findings that Zapatistas are reluctant to discuss reproductive rights. From my conversations with Sipaz, Zapatista women can have abortions, they simply are not offered in Zapatista clinics, nor is birth control for that matter. Therefore, if a woman wants an abortion or contraception they must travel outside the Zapatista Community and Chiapas to Mexico City to get it. This is not an easy feat, as transportation is almost impossible for many of the community members.
16. I could not resist; I did listen; I did write a report. For further information about the Little School, see Molina, Marta. "The Zapatistas' first school opens for session." *Waging Nonviolence*, 12 August 2013.
17. I use the term *political listening from below* as a sociopolitical process that respects indigenous perspective and positioning. Political listening is a rhetorical strategy for promoting social justice. *Political listening from below and above* recognizes that indigenous peoples live in an interconnected globalized world where the need for the ratification and adherence to *The Universal Declaration of Indigenous Rights* is necessary.

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