When Two Worlds Collide:
An Investigation of Neoliberalism's Role in Mexican Women's Activism

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x. Key Terms

The following terms are found throughout this thesis. They have been defined for reference below:

- *Caracoles*: Autonomous municipalities within Zapatista occupied Chiapas.

- *Communiques*: Together, they for the “manifesto," so-to-speak, of Zapatismo. The communiques were continuously written and sent out by Subcomandante Marcos during the rebellion of 1994.

- *Ejido*: a plot of land distributed by the state and farmed and owned communally by the individuals who live on the land.

- *EZLN*: Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or, Zapatista Army of National Liberation is the militarized army of the Zapatistas that rebelled against the state of Mexico on January 1, 1994.

- *Maquila/maquiladora* (used interchangeably): Foreign owned manufacturing plants/factories in Mexico. This thesis focuses primarily on Northern Mexican maquilas/maquiladoras, however Mexico City is also a common location for these factories.

I. Introduction:

Mexico's somewhat recent expansion of neoliberal economic policies creates an avenue for academic investigation. These policies, specifically connected to NAFTA, developed trade economies and industrialization, both of which reside primarily on the Northern border. Thus, Northern Mexico provides a landscape for global economic expansion. The harsh working conditions and environmental impacts upheld by neoliberal policies and the influx of foreign capital into Mexico has led to anti-neoliberal sentiment among the female maquila workers in Northern Mexico. These women represent their sentiments in activist groups that combat the corporate abuses of labor, environmental, and human rights. My analysis will explore activism in Northern Mexico, the lived realities of female activists and maquila workers, and the role of neoliberalism in fueling these movements. As another point of investigation, I will explore how Southern Mexico respectively experienced and reacted to the neoliberal shift.

Mexico's neoliberal policies affected its populations in very different ways, depending on where they reside within the country and their relation to the primary industries of Mexico. While industrialization and foreign direct investment expanded in Northern Mexico, Southern Mexico did not experience the same industrial investments. Nevertheless, anti-neoliberal sentiment and activism flourished in Southern Mexico. Famously, the Zapatistas made their public debut upon the ratification of NAFTA in a widespread rebellion that promoted anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist, anti-establishment sentiment. My analysis highlights the simultaneous development of Zapatismo ideology and individual women's rights activism.

Ultimately, Zapatismo functions as a vehicle for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality on a local scale. This thesis will analyze the inclusion of women's rights in Zapatista ideology as well as the progress and setbacks to achieving practiced gender equality in modern day Zapatista regions.

Ultimately, the following pages explore women's activism at the Northern border and women's activism within Zapatismo, both of which fight against Mexican neoliberal policies. Although the unique forms of activism in Northern and Southern Mexico are not interconnected, the overarching neoliberal policies brought rise to women's activism in two very different settings. Where the Zapatista rebellion was a direct political and social response to Mexico's adoption of neoliberal policies and it's rejection of policies that supported rural indigenous communities of the South, women's activism of the North centers around the economic, health, and safety outcomes of neoliberal policies and their effect on the labor force upholding its industries. Despite the differing focuses of each region's respective movements, activism against the neoliberal regime in both Northern and Southern Mexico fights for improvements in the treatment of women and ultimately broadens the reach of women's concerns about their individual rights. In this thesis, I will first identify the role of neoliberal policies in fueling women's activism at both ends of the country. Next, I will explore the progress and setbacks of women's rights movements given the geographic, economic, industrial, and demographic differences between both regions of interest. As this thesis later concludes, women's movements in Northern and Southern Mexico address interests that pertain to their regional environment, yet between both regions, the overarching fight against the social, labor, and environmental

structures created by neoliberal policies ultimately aids in the underlying fight for women's wellbeing.

II. Background/Historical Context

a. The 1917 Constitution and its implications

The Zapatista movement came to rise as a response to the Mexican government's breach of Constitutional promises that supported national land reform, rural farmers, and nationalist, domestically driven economic policies. In order to understand the inconsistent relationship between the Mexican government and populations of the rural South, it is essential to discuss the 1917 Constitution and its implications.

Following the Mexican Revolution, the 1917 Constitutional reform focused on empowerment of the labor sector, restrictions of the Roman Catholic Church's economic and educational power, and land and education reforms, all of which were the basis of Emiliano Zapata's beliefs as a leader of the peasant revolution (Collier, G.A & Collier, J. F., 2005). Emiliano Zapata, though having received a limited education, represented the ideals of the rural South and stood as a revolutionary figure against government seizures of rural land in the Moreles region. Zapata's fight for agrarian reform and indigenous peasant rights came to a climax during the Constitutional reform of 1917. The 1917 Constitution was the first document of its time to acknowledge social rights. The structural changes included in the new Constitution aided the indigenous community both symbolically through social protections and economically through agrarian reform.

Advocacy for rural land rights and agricultural expansion continued through the presidency of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). Cárdenas recognized the growing needs of farmers of the rural South and acknowledged the injustices that governmental land seizures caused for rural peasants in the past. The state took back large landholdings from the Mexican elite and instated an ejido system which distributed land plots to rural communities. Ejidos functioned under the state, but granted communal land ownership to male representatives of the (primarily indigenous) communities that worked and farmed the land (Barry, 1995). The ejido system upheld the ideals and legacy of Emiliano Zapata's Plan de Ayala, in which he states "the land belongs to those who work it." (Zapata, 1914). Cárdenas incorporated Zapata's principles into his policy, all while expanding industrialization. Cárdenas increased state involvement in agricultural development by means of government subsidies, therefore using the export of primary goods as a basis for reinvestment into the industrialization of the nation. Although this aided peasants economically and boosted industry-wide profits, indigenous farmers were still being overshadowed by state control (Barry, 1995).

The 1917 Constitution introduced a new chapter of land reform and social protections for rural, indigenous populations. The ejido system diffused power dynamics created by the large landowning elite and instead incorporated communal land ownership for poor rural communities. Just as structural reforms started favoring the indigenous South, the Mexican state shifted its focus to nation-wide industrialization, resulting in political disregard for the promises of the 1917 Constitution.

b. The shift to neoliberalism and the birth of Zapatismo

Following the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), the Mexican government reverted nationalist sentiment and the social promises of Cardenas' term and instead turned to privatization of national industries, therefore reducing the protections written into the 1917 Constitution (Collier, G.A. & Collier, J. F., 2005). This was the beginning of a lengthy era of Constitutional disregard by Mexican policymakers. Industrialization and globalization took priority over Constitutional promises meant to support the rural indigenous population. Between 1940 and 1960, the Mexican government equated industrialization with economic modernization and stressed capitalist development through new agriculture policies (Barry, 1995). Economic growth by means of agro-industrialization continued between 1940 and 1960, however, rural farmers merely provided cheap labor to commercial agriculture businesses. Due to their small plots of land and lack of access to technological advancements for farming, poverty was a reality in the rural, indigenous South (Barry, 1995). Despite attempting to utilize the agricultural sector to economically motivate industrialization, the Mexican government failed to develop agricultural policies that responded to the needs of smaller farms in the South.

Meanwhile, Northern Mexico was a point of interest for trade, investment, and the development of manufacturing industries. In 1965, Mexican policymakers developed an export-oriented *maquiladora* program, known as the Border Industrialization Program (BIP), on the Northern border that aimed to attract U.S. investors. The maquiladoras functioned as a point of mass production, where Mexican laborers (predominantly female) assembled materials imported from the U.S., and subsequently exported the finished products back to the U.S. (Sklair, 2011). The BIP initiated growth in the construction of maquiladoras, which were either direct subsidiaries or subcontractors of transnational corporations. Mexico promised foreign contractors

low wages, high productivity, proximity to the U.S., tariff loopholes, and "pliant, pro-government unions." (Louie, 2001). Ultimately, maquiladoras invited economic expansionism into Mexican national policy and boosted industrialization in Northern border states. U.S. corporate investments into Mexican maquilas grew throughout the second half of the twentieth century leading up to the ratification of NAFTA.

While Mexican economic policies shifted further toward neoliberalism backed by trade liberalization, resentment grew among the rural indigenous population, leading to sentiments of resistance. The former peasant rebellion leader Emiliano Zapata stood as an influential figure for the rural indigenous rebels who recruited and organized against the discrimination and disloyalty of the government; hence, in 1983 the Zapatistas formed under the title Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (*EZLN)*, or the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Klein, 2015). Members of the EZLN operated in a clandestine fashion in rural Southern Mexico as the Mexican government opened their economic policies to globalization. The EZLN recruited indigenous men and women throughout Southern Mexico and the movement strengthened and united against the Mexican government's prioritization of the industrial, national economy over the agricultural sector and its indiginous, rural farmers. The government disbanded infrastructural supports for peasant agriculture and privatized agrarian resources which were subsequently put into the hands of multinational agricultural industries (Collier, G.A. & Collier, J. F., 2005). The Mexican administration, at the time led by President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), argued that pulling away from a state-led development strategy, downsizing the public sector and eliminating subsidies would ultimately lower fiscal deficit and cut inflation (Moreno‐Brid, et al, 2005). Consequently, rural farmers of the South, many of whom were

organizing as part of the Zapatistas, were further neglected by the state and cuffed to systematic cyclical poverty.

c. NAFTA, Rebellion, and the Manufacturing Boom

The Mexican government's neoliberal transition came to a climax during the ratification of The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the most modern trade liberalization agreement of Mexican history. NAFTA opened international trade between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico and created a North American trade bloc that would compete with other global trade alliances (Tuttle, 2013). This negotiation directly resulted in rebellion. On January 1, 1994, the day Mexico signed onto NAFTA, rebels of the EZLN arose in the name of nationalism, sovereignty, anti-militarization, and indigenous and women's rights (Collier, G. A. & Collier, J. F., 2005). The Zapatistas presented an inclusive, non-hierarchical movement that sought to bring down neoliberal, capitalist, patriarchal structures. The EZLN expressed their demands physically through their military expansion in Southern Mexico, vocally in public speeches, and virtually through the *communiques* posted online by Subcomandante Marcos, the notorious spokesperson of the movement (Inclán, 2018). Due to the Zapatistas' use of new internet technology, these documents gained global traction among NGOs, journalists and activists, further expanding international support for the Zapatista movement and against Mexican military intervention. Despite the outpouring of international sympathy and the strength of the rebellion, the Zapatista movement did not deter the neoliberal shift of Mexican economic policies. Mexico transitioned into full trade liberalization with the U.S. and Canada, therefore increasing the state's prioritization of foreign actors, their capital, and their ideals.

Apart from the Zapatista-occupied land in the South, Mexico moved toward a trade economy based completely on neoliberal policies. The government continued privatizing land and commodifying natural resources, foreign direct investment and corporate involvement grew steadily, and the presence of maquiladoras at the Northern border increased rapidly over the next two decades (Barry, 1995). Mexican officials promised low wages and high productivity to American and Canadian corporations looking to invest in Mexican manufacturing. NAFTA exists as the backbone of Mexico's liberalized trade economy, which fuels the export-oriented manufacturing industry and promotes the import of primary goods. Consequently, the adoption of neoliberal policies resulted in dramatic reductions of farm subsidies and public-sector support (Barry, 1995). Today, neoliberalism underlies Mexican national policy; that which prioritizes foreign investments, globalization, and labor productivity, while reducing public resources.

Despite the prominence of Mexican neoliberal policies since the ratification of NAFTA, the Zapatistas and their ideologies have not surrendered. Following the rebellion, the Zapatistas established themselves in the conquered regions of Chiapas where they organized municipalities, local governments and community boards, education and healthcare structures, and a new, anti-capitalist way of life (Barmeyer, 2009). NGO support and global activism fuels the momentum and reach of Zapatismo nationally and internationally. Mexican authorities and military presence remain involved in the surveillance of the Zapatistas and their municipalities, or *caracoles*, yet the Zapatistas continue to fight for their autonomy and against race and class discriminations fueled by neoliberal policies.

As the influence of trade liberalization and foreign direct investment intensified in Mexico, the number of maquiladoras on the Northern border increased while wages remained

low. Much like the structure of the BIP, labor structures under NAFTA promised low wages and high productivity, while expanding the profit potential for foreign corporations due to the elimination of tariffs. Since the ratification of NAFTA, many predominantly female maquiladora workers have taken on an anti-neoliberal, anti-globalization sentiment due to the abuse of their labor rights and the lack of legal resources provided by the Mexican government, those of which will be discussed and analyzed in the following pages.

III. Demographic, Economic, and Political Setting: North vs. South

a. Demographics:

The demographic differences between the Northern and Southern border states of Mexico help to display the corresponding industrial categories and differing relationships with the Mexican government. The strong indigenous presence in the Southern states, specifically Oaxaca and Chiapas, aligns with the pertinence of rural farming practices and the lack of recognition by the Mexican government (as discussed in the historical context). Mexican Census data states that Oaxaca and Chiapas have the highest population numbers for indigenous language speakers, with 1,165,186 and 1,141,499 respectively (INEGI, 2010). The prominence of anti-free trade sentiment becomes much clearer for Southern populations with the recognition of indigenous population numbers. Given the anticipated decline in the domestic price of agricultural products after the liberation of trade policies, the Mexican government initiated compensation programs such as PROCAMPO to support farmers. This program benefited farmers with larger land ownership, of primarily nonindigenous backgrounds (Sadoulet, et al, 2001). The frustrations of

the indigenous population toward the Mexican government geographically align with the concentration of indigenous populations in Oaxaca and Chiapas.

With this said, the lack of indigenous presence in the Northern border states implies that this region did not experience the same frustrations and effects of neoliberal policies as the primarily indiginous populations of the South. As recorded by INEGI, the six states that make up the Northern border of Mexico (Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Sonora, and Tamaulipas) have 244,523 total indigenous language speakers. That is about nine and a half times less than that of Oaxaca and Chiapas combined and almost five times less than that of Chiapas alone (INEGI, 2010). The demographic differences between the two border regions help readers understand the differing impacts of neoliberal political shifts in Mexico.

b. Industry

While demographic differences distinguish the North from the South, the leading industries in each region and the prominence of the manufacturing industry in the North play important roles in the presence of neoliberal policies and the government's involvement in each region. Mexico's manufacturing industry is heavily concentrated in the Northern border states while agriculture has historically dominated the Southern states. The introduction of the Maquila program in the mid-1960's initiated the growth of foreign owned factories in the North due to the geographic proximity to the United States, therefore boosting trade and the manufacturing industry. By 1985, maquiladoras were the largest source of foreign exchange (Louie, 2001). Upon the ratification of NAFTA in 1994, the elimination of tariffs between Mexico, the U.S. and

Canada led foreign investors to get involved in the maquiladora system due to the low cost of labor and production.

The manufacturing sector of Mexico remains one of the most profitable industries of the nation. Although foreign owned factories exist throughout Mexico, having a large presence in Mexico City, the growing presence of maquiladoras on the Northern border accounts for the massive revenue increases since the ratification of NAFTA. Although manufacturing exists in Southern Mexico, its impact on the national economy is insignificant when compared to manufacturing in Northern border states. With this said, the liberalization of trade enacted by NAFTA resulted in huge boosts in revenue for the North, while the manufacturing economies of Southern states, or lack thereof, saw insignificant growth. The same goes for trade economies in Northern and Southern regions of Mexico. Especially since the creation of NAFTA, Mexico's trade economy concentrates on the Northern border due to its proximity to The United States. Chiapas links Mexico to the rest of Latin America, however this border's trade is irrelevant compared to the trade taking place at the Northern border with the United States and Canada.

Manufacturing and trade stand out as huge points of revenue for Mexico, and they are both primarily stationed in the Northern states. This Northern concentration of profit mirrors the priority placed on this region by the Mexican government in regards to national economic policy. This does not signify that the populations of the Northern states benefit completely from NAFTA, however, it does mean that Northern populations are more directly exposed to neoliberal policies than Southern populations.

c. Government involvement

As the Mexican government adopted neoliberal policies into the national economic platform, Mexican policymakers decreased their support for rural farmers in the years leading up to trade liberalization. Although Mexico's economy focused primarily on industrialization, manufacturing, and trade economies, the government compensated for the anticipated drop in prices of agricultural goods by creating a cash transfer program for Mexican farmers, known as PROCAMPO (Sadoulet, et al, 2001). Competitive American and Canadian multinational commercial farmers provided lower prices which ultimately threatened producers of basic crops in Mexico. PROCAMPO was designed "to manage the political acceptability of the free trade agreement among farmers" while preventing further growth of poverty among *campesinos*, or rural farming populations (Sadoulet, et al, 2001). With that said, PROCAMPO payments benefited medium to large farmholders with nonindigenous backgrounds. Considering the demographics of Chiapas and Oaxaca, PROCAMPO didn't do much to support Southern, indigenous populations that were hit hardest by the shift to trade liberalization.

Due to the dominance of foreign farmers and their low prices, Southern Mexico's agricultural industry diminished, further disadvantaging indigenous farmers. The already politically underrepresented indigenous population of Chiapas and Oaxaca relied upon sustainable farming, but experienced increases in poverty rates, growing infant mortality rates and infrastructure problems (Barry, 1995). NAFTA instigated many of these growing disadvantages, however the indigenous populations of the South were not blindsighted and did not approach the ratification of NAFTA unprepared. As this thesis will discuss further, political and social activism in Chiapas came to rise simultaneously with NAFTA.

The dominance of manufacturing industries and trade economies in Northern Mexico at the time of NAFTA's creation resulted in the government's involvement in international business. Subsequently, Mexico's economic and social policies maintained the interests foreign investors. American businesses increased their presence in Mexico's manufacturing sector by getting involved in the maquiladora program. Low costs of labor alongside a relatively quick transport of goods boosted foreign direct investment in Northern Mexico. Foreign capital aids Mexico's economy while producing a power dynamic that leads Mexican policy-makers to maintain low wages and low standards for working conditions. The economic benefits that both the U.S. and the Mexican government receive from the maquila program overshadow the issues raised by maquila workers. As I will discuss in the following section, the exploitation of female maquiladora workers in the Northern border states of Mexico results from neoliberal policies adopted by Mexican policy-makers and the prioritization of economic gains both North and South of the border.

IV. Literature Review

Women's activism in both Northern and Southern Mexico poses as a fascinating point of study given the economic, political, and demographic variables of each region. Since Mexico's shift toward neoliberal economic policies, the societal structures, daily lives, and political relations of Northern and Southern populations evolved in different ways depending on their setting. Various scholars have explored the role of neoliberalism in each region respectively. In some cases, studies revolve around the specific impacts of neoliberalism on female populations.

This thesis ties together the individual studies of neoliberalism in Northern and Southern Mexico while identifying how these impacts coincide with women's activism in each region. The following pages consider the existing literature in relation to this thesis. Although these scholars' arguments will be analyzed in full throughout this paper, the acknowledgement of their works helps to identify the gap in which my thesis fits.

Given the female majority in the maquiladora workforce, scholarship focuses on the connection between trade liberalization under NAFTA and its impacts on female populations in Northern Mexico. Research from economists Chinhui Juhn, Gergely Ujhelyi and Carolina Villegas-Sanchezand argues that women's labor participation has increased since the ratification of NAFTA, therefore increasing the number of women receiving an income (Juhn, et al, 2013). The collective contribution "Women Workers in the Maquiladoras and the Debate on Global Labor Standards" presents liberation, empowerment, and autonomy for women as the result of employment and financial independence (Dominguez, et al. 2010). Under this argument, one could conclude that neoliberal policies have left women better off. With this being said, as female labor participation increases and female laborers hold the gender majority within maquilas, women are more directly exposed to the harsh working conditions created by neoliberal policies. As my analysis will explore further, women's working conditions in the maquiladoras infringe on their labor and human rights. Sociologist Kathryn Kopinak argues that the influx of foreign capital under trade liberalization takes advantage of the preexisting patriarchal structures within Mexican society in order to exploit women (Kopinak, 1995). Kopinak presents the multiple perspectives on neoliberalism's impact as a way to represent the political and social arguments that took place as NAFTA came into existence.

Gender Studies scholar Melissa W. Wright expands upon arguments relating to the exploitation of female laborers like that of Kopinak by incorporating Marxist theories. Throughout her works, Wright acknowledges the dehumanizing process behind forming variable capital while highlighting the parallel relationship between human value and labor value (Wright, 2001b). In terms of Northern Mexico, Wright exposes the devaluation and disposability of women both within the maquiladora by corporate entities and within society by Mexican culture and officials (Wright, 2001a, 2001b). In this sense, activist groups which aim to educate about women's devaluation within patriarchal structures can open up the conversation to multiple realms of women's lives, whether that be working in the maquilas or existing in Mexican society.

Along the lines of women's devaluation in the maquila workplace, Wright highlights the temporary positions of female maquila workers. Due to their repetitive assembly work, female laborers' productivity (which coincides with their value to the company) declines over time (Wright 2001b). This produces a temporary work cycle in which women of the labor force move in and out of maquiladoras without progressing upward within the company. Given the unstable, inconsistent employment periods that result from this temporary work cycle, it is difficult for female maquila workers to advance from low wage to high wage positions. Economists Christine Siegwarth Meyer and Swati Mukerjee outline "low wage" and "high wage" sectors for female laborers that determine individual incomes based on labor participation. Female laborers shift from low wage to high wage sectors depending on their continuous labor participation (Meyer & Mukerjee, 2007). Meyer and Mukerjee broadly identify that, on a global scale, gaps in labor participation can be prevented by putting educational and child care programs into place. In the

case of Northern Mexico, however, the maquiladora's temporary work cycle makes these preventative measures ineffective.

Surprisingly, according to this same study, the highest rates of growth in labor participation since NAFTA are for populations of women with children, a group which is most likely to experience gaps in labor participation (Meyer & Mukerjee, 2007). One could argue that the increase of mothers in the labor force indicates a growth of female laborers that will remain primarily in the low wage sector. The restraints that keep female laborers in low wage sectors ultimately uphold patriarchal structures in which men move up in terms of power and income while women remain at the bottom (Kopinak, 1995). As discussed by historians Ann K. Nauman and Mireille Hutchison, deficiencies in the education of women about equal pay and exploitation play into these patriarchal components of neoliberal labor systems and ultimately result in the lack of women in high wage sectors (Meyer & Mukerjee, 2007, Nauman & Hutchison, 1997). With this said, the labor and women's rights organizations at the Northern border of Mexico work to provide education to female workers in order to promote changes within the gendered labor structure of the maquilas. My analysis will explore the actions taken by these organizations as well as how neoliberal policies play a part in facilitating women's activism.

As discussed in the Historical Context, Mexico's shift to neoliberalism subsequently resulted in the governmental shift away from funding public resources, agricultural supports, and social protections, those of which aided the rural indigenous communities of the South (Barry, 1995). Neoliberalism's negative effects on these Southern populations brought rise to the Zapatista movement; a movement that worked as a vehicle for women's rights activism. My analysis will outline the formation of the Zapatistas as well as the influence of women

throughout the rebellion. The arguments of existing scholarship surrounding the Zapatistas and their practices of gender equality help to support this analysis.

The field research of authors Shannon Speed, R. Aída Hernández Castillo, and Lynn M. Stephen provides key evidence in the form of Zapatista women's testimony. This work lays out the inclusion of women's rights within Zapatismo ideology while exploring the realities of gender equality today. The Zapatista rebellion of 1994 presented an opportunity for indigenous women to defend their individual rights while fighting for collective rights (Speed, et al, 2006). That being said, Zapatista women took on an additional form of activism on top of the collective movement, resulting in what Hernández Castillo refers to as "double-militancy". Despite the progress of women's rights within Zapatismo, the prioritization of the collective movement over individual rights creates setbacks for gender equality (Hernández Castillo, 2002).

Additionally, traditional mindsets and the influence of capitalist, patriarchal structures hold back the improvement of women's wellbeing and equality in Zapatista communities. Although the analysis portion of this thesis will explain these concepts in greater detail, it is essential to credit the work of indigenous scholar Sylvia Marcos. Marcos argues that the barriers to complete, practiced gender equality in Zapatista regions comes from colonial influence which is widely supported by modern day capitalist systems (Marcos, 2014). The devaluation of women by capitalist socioeconomic structures (much like what we observe in Northern Mexico) influences the devaluation of women within rural indigenous communities, in which individuals "reproduce the values of the dominant order that reduces and exploits [them]." (Marcos, 2014). Because Zapatistas fight to distance themselves from their oppressors by seeking autonomy from

the Mexican government, they are further distancing themselves from the neoliberal, capitalist structures that oppress and devalue women.

Neoliberalism brought rise to the Zapatista movement, which ultimately worked as a vehicle for the representation of women's rights by rural, indigenous communities of the South. Although this movement highlights the importance of women's rights and the oppression that accompanies capitalism, Zapatista communities still experience setbacks to achieving gender equality due to the priority of the collective movement and the longevity of traditional, hegemonic thought (Speed, et al, 2006, Hernández Castillo, 2002). Existing literature explores different arguments and perspectives on gender equality practices in Zapatista-occupied regions, as well as how neoliberalism initiated the momentum for women's rights activism.

Throughout this thesis, I will discuss the content of the above scholars as well as additional field work and testimony. While the arguments of these authors uphold my analysis, I will extend upon them by connecting and comparing women's activism of Northern and Southern Mexico in relation to neoliberalism's significance in each region. This thesis will bring two distinct regions of Mexico together by noting their respective sentiments and reasoning for activism. Based on the distinct influence of neoliberalism within each region, Northern and Southern women's experiences differ, therefore differentiating their rights movements. The following pages will identify the neoliberal experiences for women of each región and will ultimately assess the role of neoliberalism in facilitating women's activism.

V. Methodology

Despite the realistic barriers to conducting original field research, existing scholarship provides a basis for my understanding of the experiences of women of Northern and Southern Mexico in relation to neoliberal economic policies. This thesis reviews the resulting conditions and realities of each region as they pertain to Mexico's neoliberal shift while incorporating the respective responses of activist groups. Although the populations of Northern and Southern Mexico exist in very different economic, social, and political settings, the following essay will connect the two regions by means of exploring forms of women's activism and their relation to Mexico's neoliberal policies, specifically NAFTA.

Scholarly field research and direct testimony from individuals of each region guide the analysis of this thesis. By conducting a critical textual analysis for each source, Chapter One utilizes interviews with maquila workers included in the works of Melissa M. Wright, Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, Carolyn Tuttle, and Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre, in order to analyze the outcomes of neoliberal labor structures for women and their activism at the Northern border. These works consist of academic scholarship and studies, informal interviews, and documentary film material, all of which credibly explore the experiences of individual women and women's rights organizations in Northern Mexico. Chapter One analyzes the economic, environmental, and gendered aspects of the women's struggle at the Northern border while identifying the many perspectives of neoliberalism's influence on the region and women's activism respectively.

Following a similar method, Chapter Two identifies the roles of the neoliberal government shift and the Zapatista rebellion in facilitating women's rights activism. Through the analysis of Zapatista women's testimony in the works of Hilary Klien, Shannon Speed, R. Aída

Hernández Castillo and Lynn M. Stephen, Chapter Two will explore the role of women within the EZLN, the function of Zapatismo as a vehicle for gender equality and women's rights, and the practices of gender equality in Zapatista-occupied regions today. Additionally, the Women's Revolutionary Law within Zapatismo ideology is a primary source for the examination of women's rights in the collective movement.

The above materials and primary sources are credible and reliable. Nevertheless, my analysis uses a critical lens to look at the way in which gender and women's rights are or are not discussed. These works may include opinionated perspectives and biases based on the authors respective backgrounds, however, by observing the level and form of discussions relating to gender equality and the treatment of women, author bias is detected and noted to ensure the validity of my conclusions.

VI. Analysis

CHAPTER ONE

Northern Mexico: The Maquiladora Labor Structure, Activism, and Gender Equality

a. "Low wages, high productivity"

Neoliberal labor structures, specifically those created through trade liberalization, promise low wages and high productivity to foreign investors. As discussed above, Mexico's adoption of NAFTA increased foreign investment from the U.S. and Canada and fueled the expansion of the manufacturing industry on the Northern border. Multinational corporations

embraced standards of high productivity and low wages within their Mexican factory platforms. Today, this corporate standard prevails throughout Northern Mexico.

Much like the international business relations created by NAFTA, the creation of the Maquiladora program in 1960s Mexico ultimately promised low wages and high productivity to its clientele. Over the years, this business model developed into a production machine that paid its workers the bare minimum and created a cycle of temporary work on the Northern border. In the 1970's, Mexican policymakers signed a letter of intention to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stating that workers' salaries would not increase in an attempt to fuel foreign direct investment and improve the Mexican economy (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). These low wages persist in modern day Mexico, with maquila women working six days a week for $68 USD (about $11 USD per day) (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). Low wages, therefore, have an impact on the length of maquila women's shifts. In regards to low wages and long hours, one maquila woman, Refugio Arrieta, states:

> I worked lots! I worked 12 hours more or less because they paid us so little that if you worked more, you got more money. I did this because the schools in Mexico don't provide everything … I had five kids. It's very expensive. I also worked out of my house and sold ceramics. I did many things to get more money for my kids. (Louie, 2001)

A low income, met with a lack of public resources from the government, leaves maquiladora workers like Arrieta struggling to make ends meet. On top of low wages, maquila workers must achieve high levels of productivity throughout their employment in order to retain their jobs. Maquila employees work long hours with minimal breaks, and are initially put on a ninety-day contract so their employers can easily dismiss them if any problems arise (Tuttle, 2012). Additionally, women of the maquiladoras experience job insecurity out of fear that their

employer will relocate to Asian countries, some of which provide even lower wages. Between 2004 and 2006, upwards of 350,000 jobs disappeared due to the relocation of maquiladora companies to Asia (De La Torre, & Funari, 2006). In many cases, corporations that relocate fail to pay severances to their former employees. Carmen Duran, a former employee of Sanyo and a member of the activist group Casa de la Mujer Factor X, shared her experience as a victim of multinational corporation relocation:

> "When Sanyo [electronics factory] left, they didn't want to pay our severance. They depart with their hands full and leave us with our hands empty… We see that these companies can go anywhere in the world. But along with their capital comes an impact on the environment and on people's health. I am determined to stand up to them." (De La Torre & Funari, 2006).

Maquila women are disadvantaged by their employers, both economically and physically, as this paper will acknowledge in-depth further on. As maquiladora wages are kept low in order to deter the relocation of foreign corporations and investors, women are held to high standards of productivity and obedience in order to maintain their positions. Testimony from Lupita Castaneda, a member of the women's labor rights activism group Promotoras por los Derechos de las Mujeres of Tijuana, Mexico, demonstrates the relationship between the value of laborers and globalization fueled by neoliberal policies:

> "Within globalization, a woman factory worker is like a commodity. And if that commodity is not productive, if she's not attractive for globalization, because she starts to defend her rights, then they look for that commodity elsewhere. As a maquila woman, this worries me because we are just objects. Objects of labor." (De La Torre & Funari, 2006)

Globalization creates spaces for multinational corporations to mistreat, overwork, and dictate the livelihood of their workers, therefore dehumanizing the lower-working class of developing

countries. Because women's labor is commodified, the individual laborer is valued only for her productivity. When a laborer becomes less productive, she is no longer valuable to the company, and is subsequently dismissed from her position. As a result of this devaluation, a cycle of temporary work unfolds in which maquiladora laborers are exhausted of their value due to being overworked in harsh conditions, terminated by their employer, and cycled into a new maquila to begin anew the debilitating journey of labor turnover (Wright, 2001b).

High turnover rates may come across as a product of overworked laborers, however the corporations that initiate this process do not frame this as such. From their point of view, high turnover rates result from an "untrainable" female labor force that does not practice corporate loyalty (Wright, 2001b). Turnover is therefore a gendered concept, used by corporations to devalue their female workers, blame them for their untrainability and disloyalty, and secure that their position is, and always will be, temporary. One American human resources manager at a television manufacturing plant states: "You can't train workers if they won't stay around. That's the problem with these girls. You can't train them. They don't understand the meaning of job loyalty." (Wright, 2001b). This discourse places the blame on the female workers for high turnover rates, and does not speak to the lack of opportunity given to these women for upward growth within the company. Because of corporate unwillingness to promote women within the plant, they are overworked within their assembly positions and eventually move to other plants, either in search of better pay and conditions, or at the cost of their inability to produce at their employer's standards which results in dismissal.

Despite corporate remarks about the disloyalty of maquila workers, turnover continues to pigeon-hole women "into the lowest-waged and dead-end jobs throughout the maquila" (Wright,

2001b). Meanwhile, Mexican men, who are seen as far more loyal and "trainable", move into skilled and higher-salaried positions. Skill, authority, and productivity are therefore associated with the male workforce, and dissociated from the female workforce. With this said, the repetitive, monotonous, temporary work of the female maquila laborer is still highly sought after. The disposability of the female maquiladora worker, due to both her low wages and lack of authority, makes it easy for foreign corporations to take advantage of women's labor and rights. Factories such as General Motors Delphi rely on rapid turnover to allow for employment cuts in lean times and additional workers in boom times (Wright, 2001b). Although it may be relatively easy for maquila women to get rehired after termination, this consistent cycle of dismissal and reemployment means that jobs are never stable or secure.

Corporations associate high turnover rates with female laborers and subsequently benefit from the brevity of their employment. Employers maintain a productive, compliant, easily replaceable labor force that upholds the value and output of the company. As a result, gendered labor structures distinguish the "trainable" from the "untrainable", therefore solidifying women's place at the bottom of the corporate totem pole. Here, they receive minimal wages and benefits which their employers associate with their value as human beings (Taylor, 2010). Women make up about 70 percent of the maquila workforce on the Northern border of Mexico, with assembly positions filled primarily by women and supervisor roles filled primarily by men (Louie, 2001). That being said, gender is a marker of an individual's value within the maquila, with women being stereotypically "cheap and docile" (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). Specific traits tied to female workers, such as dexterity, attention to detail, and patience with tedious work, associate stereotypical gender roles with elements of low-authority, low-salary positions of the maquila.

This type of work keeps female laborers in high demand. Furthermore, maquila employers expect their female laborers to have a cultural predisposition to docility and submissiveness to patriarchal figures (Wright, 2001b). These values uphold the gendered labor structure and patriarchal power dynamics within the maquila.

The strict, misogynistic characteristics of the maquiladora system leave women's labor rights abused and unacknowledged by corporate and governmental authorities. Consequently, organization, unionization, and anti-employer sentiments are highly discouraged and often threatened with immediate dismissal. Acute surveillance of maquiladora workers helps the employer evaluate their laborers in terms of both docility and productivity. In any instance where laborers reveal an interest in expressing grievances, their docility diminishes alongside their value to the company. Therefore, their employment is threatened and their work environment becomes more hostile (Wright, 2001b). To maintain a seemingly docile workforce, maquiladora employers more commonly hire married women (Dominguez, et al., 2010). Because Mexican patriarchal culture implies the dominance of men over women, women who align with hegemonic social structures —in this case, marriage— are more likely to succumb to patriarchal figures. Seeing that unmarried women are less commonly hired in the maquiladoras, employment benefits women who seemingly follow patriarchal values of society. Thus, these patriarchal structures are relaid into work regimes (Dominguez, et al., 2010). Married women are rewarded, whereas single women find themselves at an economic disadvantage.

Supervisors of the maquilas use diligent surveillance to consistently test the value of laborers. They watch for signs of stiff fingers, repetitive stress disorders, headaches, or boredom among assembly-line workers to conclude whether or not their value has been exhausted. In an

interview with a television manufacturing company in Ciudad Juarez, one manager stated: “This is not the kind of work you can do for years at a time. It wears you out. We don’t want the girls here after they’re tired of the work.” (Wright, 2001b). After working maquila women to the point of physical exhaustion, employers use the observed signs of declining work performance as justification for dismissal without eligibility for severance pay (Wright, 2001b). Corporate figures equate the value of the female maquiladora worker with her productivity and economic contributions to the factory. As soon as this worker has no economic value, the corporate authority wants nothing to do with her.

As long as a maquiladora worker appears to be valuable, the company she works under controls her work patterns, going so far as to dictate her physical body. The surveillance practices mentioned above go beyond the evaluation of one’s productivity by infringing on female worker’s privacy and rights as women. Many female workers must demonstrate to company doctors or nurses that they are menstruating on a monthly basis. One worker explains: “They even make the *señoras* [older, married women] do it. They treat us like trash.” (Wright, 2001b). In many cases, women falsify their menstruation exams in order to continue working to support themselves and their families. Eventually, if these women start to show signs of pregnancy, they are either harassed through being assigned more physically demanding jobs, or terminated without severance (Wright, 2001b). Throughout the maquila network of the U.S.-Mexico border, employers view pregnancy as a handicap on productivity. Contrary to hegemonic societal structures that idealize women as child-bearers, pregnancy is forbidden within the maquilas. As one supervisor in a machine shop of Juarez stated: “This is not a place for pregnant women. They take too many restroom breaks, and then they’re gone for a month. It

slows us down." (Wright, 2001b). In many maquilas, pregnancy tests are necessary for employment, and if a worker becomes pregnant, she will be dismissed (Tuttle, 2012).

According to the corporate, authoritative perspective, pregnant women devalue the labor force as a whole. With this in mind, one could argue that maquilas indirectly support patriarchal, hegemonic structures that keep women home from work and bearing children. Traditional, patriarchal Mexican culture expects women to be the bearer of children and economically, authoritatively inferior to their male counterparts. While she may be subverting this culture by participating in maquila labor and, to a degree, gaining economic independence, the maquila holds her back from simultaneously bearing children. In other words, maquila women cannot find economic independence *and* maintain their "role" as child-bearers; they must choose between the two. This is not to say that maquila women who choose not to have children will benefit unproportionally to those who do. The maquila provides an opportunity for women to make an income, however, this opportunity is temporary, low paying in comparison to male employees, and predetermined to remain low in the ranks of authority. Wright explains, "her culture will ensure that she not go too far afield by inculcating her with a disposition that makes her impossible to train, to promote, or to encourage as a long-term employee." (2001b). Maquila employers recognize women's desire to work and, therefore, hire them by the masses. The positions given to them, however, limit their ability for growth within the company, and encroach on their personal, laboral, and environmental rights, all of which play into their women's rights.

Neoliberal labor structures ultimately create a work environment defined by low wages, the prioritization of productivity, temporary employment cycles and the maintenance of

patriarchal power dynamics. This type of work environment results in the devaluation and degradation of female laborers which threatens their health and human rights. The following pages will explore how capitalist labor structures, fueled by neoliberal policies, permeate into the physical livelihood of maquiladora women.

b. Health and environmental impacts

As described above, the maquiladoras at Mexico's northern border create work environments that push female laborers to the point of exhaustion due to long hours, strict surveillance, repetitive tasks, and little compensation. More importantly, these work environments impact the physical wellbeing of maquiladora laborers and their families. Strict working conditions and exposure to hazardous materials mutually impact the health of maquiladora workers and individuals of the communities surrounding the factories.

Although maquilas manufacture a wide variety of products, the majority fall under the category of electronics. Maquila women typically work with metals, chemicals and plastics when producing their company's product. It is the responsibility of maquila companies to provide their workers with protective gear and ensure that they are not endangered by manufacturing materials. In some cases, however, researchers have found inconsistencies in protective gear for maquila workers who spend their shift in close proximity to the hazardous material, chromium (Tuttle, 2012). Many female maquiladora workers testify that their work environment threatens their health and puts them at risk of contracting sicknesses and diseases such as breast cancer, leukemia, and heart or lung disease. Former maquila worker and current member of the independent unionization collective SEDEPAC, Elizabeth "Beti" Robles Ortega, states:

> Ecological problems are increasing… There are daily deaths of worker women. You can see and feel the contamination of the water and the air. As soon as you arrive and start breathing the air in Acuna and Piedras Negras, you sense the heavy air, making you feel like vomiting. (Louie, 2001).

Air contamination creates respiratory problems for maquila workers, both inside the factories and in the surrounding communities. Electronics manufacturers ventilate their factories, and in doing so, release chemical fumes into the surrounding environment. This broadens the impact of chemical exposure beyond those who work in the factories and onto their families and neighbors. That being said, maquiladora workers experience the closest degree of exposure to chemicals such as lead and chromium. One worker explains: "The only problem is the lead contamination. You breathe lead everyday. Panasonic never informs you of the risks from toxic chemicals in the factory" (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). Despite the potential harm that could arise from their workers' exposure to toxic chemicals, maquila corporate figures do very little in terms of prevention or information. Maquila women's lack of power against corporate and government officials prevents the persecution of these human rights abuses. This aspect of the neoliberal power structure will be discussed in depth further on.

Health problems in the maquila workforce result from chemical exposure, lack of air ventilation, and inadequate protective gear. The maquila's strict working conditions, as mandated by the prioritization of productivity, also contribute to health problems among workers. Maquila worker and activist Carmen Duran spoke about her experience working in an electronics factory:

> I wanted to work at Sanyo because it was near my house. I started to work there and I liked the environment. But I didn't like how they treated us. They harassed and pressured us. We were also exposed to chemicals… When I started working there, my nose used to bleed… I started having

> kidney trouble because they wouldn't let us drink water or go to the bathroom. (De La Torre & Funari, 2006)

As stated previously, neoliberal labor structures promise low wages and high productivity (Louie, 2001). For corporate figures of the maquila, in this case Sanyo, expansion of productivity to its fullest potential implies overworking laborers and depriving them of basic necessities such as water and toilet use.

Although maquila workers are most susceptible to chemical exposure related health problems, health risks are not confined to the walls of the factory. Communities surrounding Tijuana's maquiladora regions experience constant waste flows that originate from the maquilas and end up polluting natural water sources. Those who live in close proximity to the maquilas are accustomed to sores, hives, skin irritation, and respiratory issues from air and water contamination (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). Children are especially susceptible to these health risks due to their underdeveloped organs and immune systems. Many maquiladora women who reside in these neighborhoods must change out of their uniforms before coming into contact with their children to prevent skin irritation or hives (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). Despite the measures taken to prevent their children's skin irritation, some impacts of the maquilas are unavoidable for mothers in the community. Birth defects such as hydrocephalus (infant is born without fingernails) and anencephaly (infant is born without a brain and dies at birth) result from lead exposure prior to birth (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). In Tijuana, specifically, maquila mothers presume that increases in birth defects are associated with Metales y Derivados, an abandoned factory that failed to properly dispose of chemical waste. Metales y Derivados left around 6,000 tons of lead slag to contaminate the surrounding environment (De La Torre &

Funari, 2006). Although Mexican officials filed a warrant for the arrest of the company's owner, the responsibility to dispose of the chemical waste falls onto the Mexican government (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). Still, the Mexican government has failed to provide appropriate legal and infrastructural support to communities impacted by the presence of maquiladoras. Despite the apparent evidence of labor rights abuse and indirect physical abuse by the maquiladoras, female laborers and members of surrounding communities continue to seek justice for environmental crimes and depleting health conditions while maquila representatives and Mexican government officials do very little to prevent or remedy their cause and effect.

Given the growth of foreign investment into Mexico since its adoption of neoliberal economic policies, one would expect Mexican policymakers to uphold the infrastructural environment of the border towns hosting these investors, but this is not the case. Infrastructural underdevelopment in border towns such as Tijuana consists of a lack of running water, incomplete sewage systems, and instability of electrical circuits (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). The inadequacy of public resources in neighborhoods occupied by maquila workers results in public sanitation problems, financial tolls, and further physical harm. As discussed previously, natural water sources in these communities are often contaminated by chemical waste from the maquila, making them dangerous for bathing (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). Consequently, Tijuana residents must purchase jugs of water to bathe in and drink, therefore increasing their financial instability. In times of tax increases or national elections, politicians and Mexican policymakers promise that these residents' money and votes will yield infrastructural change, yet these promises remain empty.

According to maquiladora activists and laborers, the conditions of the maquiladoras and the surrounding environment have only worsened since the introduction of trade liberalization (KPFA, 2005, and Wright, 2001b). Salaries remain low and job security weakens due to the commodification of labor and devaluation of women. Many women cannot live off the low wages they earn from maquiladora work, therefore forcing them into unstable living conditions. Northern border cities do not have adequate infrastructure to house the large populations of factory workers that accumulate with the consistent construction of foreign plants. The Mexican government has not initiated housing programs for these workers, nor have their foreign employers. Julia Quiñonez, a coordinator for the women's labor activism group Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, describes the disconnect between maquiladora companies and their employees: "There are large transnationals such as Alcoa and Delphi operating in these cities yet workers are living in conditions where they have to construct their houses out of cardboard, out of materials taken from the factories." (KPFA, 2005). Migration from Southern, more rural areas of Mexico and Central America is a factor in the overpopulation of Northern regions of Mexico. Steady growth of Northern migration patterns parallels the influx of multinational corporations since the ratification of NAFTA, therefore affecting the size of Northern Mexico's manufacturing labor force as a whole. Migration is a topic that warrants more attention than this thesis permits, however, it is important to keep in mind when observing living environments and overpopulation in Mexico-U.S. border towns.

c. Safety risks at the Northern border

Lower-working class residents of Northern border towns in Mexico struggle from infrastructural underdevelopment intensified by overpopulation, however, female residents suffer further from threats to their personal safety based on their gender. Throughout the 1990's, almost 200 female corpses surfaced in the desert outside of Ciudad Juarez, many showing signs of rape and torture (Wright, 2001a). Despite the gravity of this situation, Mexican officials, maquila owners and criminologists turned to victim blaming to provide reasoning and justification for the murders. Instead of taking on preventive methods like street light installation or transportation services for female maquila workers to and from the factory, Mexican officials place the blame on female workers for "seeking adventure without paying attention to the danger" (Orquiz 1998). In 1999, a femicide survivor identified her abuser as a maquiladora bus driver. Although this case directly connected the maquilas to recurring femicides and abuses, corporate personele denied any affiliation. As Wright describes, victim blaming discourses remained prevalent in Ciudad Juarez:

> As the Spanish criminologist asked in reference to the discovery of a girl's body, ''What was a thirteen-year-old girl doing out at night anyway?'' Evidence of her presence outside her home in the nighttime does not prove her economic need or a city full of nighttime commuters. Rather, her presence in the night points toward a cultural decline within which her death, a form of absence, can be logically anticipated. (Wright, 2001a).

This "death by culture" narrative presented by Wright lays out the general perceptions of and expectations for women in Mexican culture. Hegemonic structures that keep women from being economically and socially independent punish women further by using their "defiance" of patriarchal values as justification for abuse or murder.

In many femicide cases, women are murdered for their organs which are then sold on the black market. Like the commodification of labor seen in the maquilas, femicide further commodifies the female body. Multinational maquiladora corporations value women according to their economic productivity, and murderers associate women with the external value of their organs, therefore creating another avenue of female devaluation and commodification (Wright, 2001a). Much like the individuals who commit femicide, maquiladora manufacturing firms "tend to 'discard' of their victims once they get what they want from them" (Stack & Valdez, 1999). The disposability of women is apparent both inside and outside of the physical maquila itself.

Victim blaming narratives from Mexican officials, and from Mexican society in general, assumes that women who "rebel" against the gendered cultural expectations −those which confine them to their homes at night− should expect abuse and/or murder. From this perspective, women who rebel are putting themselves at risk and therefore deserve physical harm, and because they are defying Mexican cultural norms, infrastructural preventative measures are not worthwhile (Wright, 2001a). Victim blaming discourses assume that victims of femicide sought a life of adventure, dancing, and promiscuity, when in fact, many of these women were simply doing their duty as maquila workers. Female commuters, either returning from night shifts or heading to early morning shifts at the maquila, risk their physical wellbeing by simply being a part of the female labor force. The physical risks that come at the cost of seeking economic independence therefore inform the strength of hegemonic, patriarchal structures in Northern Mexican society. Threats to female safety may deter women from seeking maquila job opportunities, which, in a sense, holds women back from economic gender equality and opportunities for economic independence. Although, as discussed above, the maquilas do not

provide the same economic outlook for women as they do for men, it is important to note the variables that may keep women from seeking employment in the first place.

Whether femicide victims were on their way to work at the maquilas or going out for a night of dancing, their physical presence outside after dark should be no reason for their demise, let alone justification for their abuser. This is, however, the reality for border towns in Northern Mexico, specifically Ciudad Juárez (Wright, 2001a). The Mexican government and maquila companies have an opportunity to better the safety of these women through infrastructure and transportation improvements, however their devaluation and cultural reputation keeps these preventions from happening. Thus, femicide continues on.

d. Women's activism in Northern Mexico

Given the women's rights abuses in Northern Mexico's border towns by maquila multinational corporations, Mexican policymakers and governmental representation, and committers of femicides, maquila women have taken matters into their own hands by creating labor collectives, environmental boards, and women's rights organizations. These groups unite female laborers and their concerns to fight for local and national governmental recognition of women's laboral, environmental and gender rights. In the following pages, I will explore the organization, function, progress and setbacks of notable women's rights groups of Northern Mexico.

In regards to injustices within the maquila itself, women's labor collectives and independent union movements work to improve working conditions and compensation for maquila women. Upon the introduction of maquila programs in Mexico, the Frente Auténtico de

Trabajo (FAT) formed as an independent union movement that formed in the 1960s and has since represented the interests of maquila women at the Northern border (Hathaway, 2002). FAT dedicates itself to principles of "union liberty, union democracy, independence from all political parties, autonomy from government and employers, and the material and spiritual elevation of the working class." (Hathaway, 2002). In many cases, maquila corporations discourage independent unionizing and instead provide their workers with an internal, employer-funded, undemocratic union, also known as a "ghost union" (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). Although unionization is legal under Mexican constitutional law, maquila employers tend to dismiss or penalize employees who reveal an interest in organizing. In order to protect the company against labor rights abuse claims, maquilas use ghost unions to create a loophole in Mexican law. Simply stated, maquilas can "legally" dismiss independent unionizers while claiming that they are not infringing on workers' right to organize, due to the "union" that already exists (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). The provided union, however, protects corporate interests and disregards workers' concerns. FAT works against corporate controlled, ghost unions, and promotes independent organization despite possible consequences. FAT currently owns a work center in Ciudad Juarez that serves as a central location for organizing and educational activities. While FAT's educational activities pertaining to women's labor rights tend to have successful turnouts, organizational efforts struggle to command the same audience due to workers' fear of unemployment (Louie, 2001). As discussed above, knowledge of a worker's involvement in independent unionization threatens the stability of a maquila's work environment, often resulting in dismissal. Women who participate in unionizing organizations acknowledge the possibility that their employment is at risk.

Similarly to FAT, Casa de La Mujer Factor X (Factor X) upholds women's labor rights and seeks changes in wages and working conditions within the maquilas. Founded in Tijuana in 1977, Factor X incorporates the concerns of women in the workplace with injustices outside of the maquilas such as domestic violence and health rights (Louie, 2001). Carmen Valadez and Reyna Monterro, long-time activists and founders of Factor X, recognize the importance of creating a community of female laborers that share similar concerns. By leading labor rights workshops, Valadez and Monterro aim to educate women about their rights and fight against the national spread of maquila wages and working conditions, claiming "NAFTA represents nothing but the 'maquiladorization' of the region" (Louie, 2001). Promotoras por los Derechos de las Mujeres, a Tijuana organization aligned with Factor X, also aims to educate female laborers about their rights and opportunities. Within their women's coalition, the Promotoras share their experiences and organize for justice. As stated by Promotora leader Carmen Duran, "what little you know, you pass on. I can't stay quiet anymore. I have to defend whatever right is being violated" (De La Torre & Funari, 2006).

Due to the power of multinational maquila corporations, many maquila women are unaware of their labor rights. Groups like FAT, Factor X and the Promotoras, however, work to increase education and community surrounding workplace injustices. The introduction of these educational programs for female laborers could potentially result in an increase of women in high wage sectors (Meyer & Mukerjee, 2007, Nauman & Hutchison, 1997). It is important to note the risks that arise for these organizations' participants and leaders. Despite threats to their employment, educational programs and labor rights organizations persist throughout Northern Mexico thanks to the devotion of its leaders to achieving justice and equality in the workplace.

In regards to the environmental impacts from chemical use in maquilas, women's collectives like Colectivo Chilpancingo represent the environmental rights and health concerns of women in communities surrounding Tijuana maquilas. With the aid of the San Diego Environmental Health Coalition, Colectivo Chilpancingo fights for the government's recognition of environmental crimes committed by maquila corporations, such as the abandonment of lead contamination by Metales y Derivados explained above (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). Women of Colectivo Chilpancingo demonstrated day and night outside of Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente (PROFEPA), a branch of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, demanding for environmental rights to be acknowledged and respected by the Mexican government. Although PROFEPA's Director recognized health impacts and the abuse of environmental rights associated with this contamination, he passed responsibility for the clean-up of the former Metales y Derivados site onto the office of the Attorney General (De La Torre & Funari, 2006). Colectivo Chilpancingo continues to defend the environmental rights of maquila women and their communities, yet Mexican government officials fail to prioritize the rights and health of these individuals.

Because women make up around 70 percent of the maquiladora labor force, many of the workplace, environmental, and health injustices discussed above closely align with women's rights as a whole. Therefore, multifaceted women's collectives emerge, some of which focus on "women's rights" but tackle labor and environmental rights simultaneously. Due to the high rates of violence and femicide in the North, many women's collectives focus on aid and sanctuary for victims. As the first and only rape crisis and sexual assault center in Ciudad Juarez, Casa Amiga

stands up against cultural and economic variables that uphold violence against women. In the words of Esther Chavez Cano, a feminist activist and founder of Casa Amiga:

> "We are fighting a battle against the people who always blame the victim. It's always her fault. How can it be a 15-year-old girl's fault when her uncle rapes her? Or the woman whose husband beats her everyday? Or the young woman who is kidnapped on the way to work in a maquila? This is what we're fighting against to save these women's lives." (Wright, 2001a).

Casa Amiga aims to dissolve victim-blaming narratives and reverse the devaluation of women by corporate entities and Mexican authorities. Through educational workshops and publicity, Casa Amiga identifies economic independence and sexual and social liberty of women as motivating factors for domestic abuse, rape, and femicide, as well as police reluctance to treat the cases seriously (Wright, 2001a). They attach the devaluation and disposability of women in both cultural and industry settings to the rise in femicide rates. Although maquila corporations deny any connection to the ever-increasing femicide cases, Casa Amiga holds the industry accountable and demands funding for security personnel and street lighting, and changes to production schedules (Wright, 2001a). Esther Chavez Cano claims that violence against women is a product of female devaluation, a process upheld by multiple sides of society: "It is everywhere. In our homes, in our schools, in the maquila. It is a crisis. When we look at women as if they were trash, then something is wrong." (Wright, 2001a).

Women's rights organizations in Northern Mexico confront the abuses of labor, environmental and gender rights by maquila industry operations and the respective responses of the Mexican government. In doing so, these organizations have found success and progress for women's rights, yet continuously face setbacks. As a result of organized protest, women of

Northern Mexico raise awareness about the abuse of their human and labor rights, and occasionally facilitate positive change in the conditions of the maquilas.

Protests within the maquilas by groups like Frente Auténtico de Trabajo (FAT) prove to have an impact on the recognition of workers' interests. Although organization of independent unions remains unsuccessful in many cases, maquila workers of the Han Young facility in Tijuana successfully defended their right to unionize, starting in 1997 (Williams, 2003). By taking part in walkouts, hunger strikes, and group demonstration, women of Han Young successfully enforced their vote for the independent union, however they have had to protect this success several times since (Wright, 2001b). Similarly, after the 1994 devaluation of the peso, protests emerged nationally throughout the maquilas. Mexico's largest maquila, the Ciudad Juarez Thompson-Electronic RCA television factory, staged a successful 5600-worker walkout to demand an increase in hourly wages (Wright, 2001b). Throughout the continuous struggle of female maquila laborers, successes remain mostly in individual protests, as opposed to complete independent unionization. Maquila corporations remain in control of working conditions and wages, however, women's labor collectives use educational workshops to spread awareness about labor rights abuses and the organizational potential of maquila women.

Women fighting for the recognition of their rights at the Northern border have also found success through protests and organization of gender rights movements. Ocho de Marzo (named after March 8th, International Women's Day), is an internationally honored women's movement that organizes and leads successful marches to raise awareness about femicide at Mexico's northern border. After the 1995 discovery of over 50 dead women in the desert outside of Ciudad Juarez, Ocho de Marzo protested against the Juarez police and mayor, hounding them for an

expansion of resources and infrastructural change (Wright, 2001a). Though local government denied the need for infrastructural changes and instead adopted a victim-blaming narrative, Ocho de Marzo's demonstrations aroused national and international conversation, awareness, and sympathy.

As a more locally focused organization, Casa Amiga broadens awareness through public appearances and educational workshops. Recently, maquiladora facilities in the Ciudad Juarez region started allowing activists associated with Casa Amiga to hold seminars during the work day (Wright, 2001b). These activists discuss women's rights, resources and strategies for diffusing domestic violence. Although maquilas continue to deny their connection to femicides and violence against women, Casa Amiga is taking steps to better educate women within the maquila about their gender rights. In regards to their relationship with maquila corporations, Casa Amiga founder Esther Chavez Cano states: "They know we have the publicity but they don't really trust what we're doing… It's very hard to change the way people think about women here. We threaten them." (Wright, 2001b). Women's activist groups such as Casa Amiga certainly have an impact on maquila corporations' stances on violence against women. Although these corporate entities do not consider their industry a factor in femicides, allowing public seminars from women's activist groups aids in awareness about this devastating reality.

Regardless of the successes achieved by maquila women's coalitions since the ratification of NAFTA, the legal and economic power of multinational corporations keeps many affected women from achieving legal justice for the abuse of their health and labor rights. In cases where maquila workers fight for severance payments, like that of Carmen Duran, lawyers are provided by the government and therefore favor the employer (De La Torre & Funari, 2006).

Corruption between maquila corporations and the Mexican government result in biased trials that typically leave conflicts unresolved and justice for workers unachieved. Additionally, standing up to corporate officials puts maquila women in a precarious position. Whether it be an individual battle or group organization, maquila women like labor rights activist Elizabeth "Beti" Robles Ortega can find themselves on an employment blacklist if they are too outspoken (Louie, 2001). Threats to maquila women's already unstable financial situation can keep injustices from being recognized legally. As discussed by Wright, docility adds to a woman's productivity and, therefore, her value in the workplace (2001b). When a maquila woman abandons her docility and replaces it with activism, she is risking her employment, yet making room for justice.

As of today, the Association of Maquiladoras (AMAC) refuses to admit any connection between the industry and femicide. Instead, the AMAC implies that the source of these murders is "a Mexican culture that has been undermined by drugs, loose women, nefarious American influences, and weak family values." (Córdoba, 1995). Much like Mexican government officials, the AMAC blames the victims themselves and does very little in terms of prevention for their employees. This speaks further to the disposability and devaluation of women by the maquiladora industry. Although women's rights activists continue to stand up to maquila corporations, the legal and economic resources at hand create a power dynamic that will continue to favor corporate interests.

e. Alternative perspectives and closing remarks

Studies of maquiladora environments display exploitation and poor working conditions for female laborers, but free trade scholars point out the increase in female labor participation

since the ratification of NAFTA. Therefore, some argue, trade liberalization could be a factor in the empowerment of women at the Northern border: “apologists [for free trade] have countered that women's employment has provided them opportunities to increase their power and status and improve their economic situation.” (Kopinak, 1995) This argument states that women’s labor participation in maquiladoras results in liberation, empowerment, and autonomy for women. As trade relations between Mexico and the U.S. develop, foreign direct investment becomes more consistent, more maquiladoras arise at the border, and ultimately, more women are employed (Dominguez, et al., 2010). Labor participation statistics aligned with free trade policies show the general increase in labor participation for women since the ratification of NAFTA (Juhn, et al., 2013). Additionally, this study argues that the tariff reductions that accompanied NAFTA resulted in increased employment and wage bill shares for female workers (Juhn, et al., 2013). From this perspective, benefits arise for women despite being exposed to unequal and harsh working conditions.

After exploring the realities of maquila women’s lifestyles and working environments, it is safe to say that increasing female labor participation as a result of NAFTA does not necessarily result in complete liberation and empowerment. I would argue, however, that increases in female labor participation informs the wide exposure of women to maquila working conditions, therefore fueling women’s activism in Northern Mexico. The time and research constraints of this thesis impede on my ability to conclude on the overall changes in gender equality in Northern Mexico since the ratification of NAFTA, but my observations of scholarship surrounding the maquila industry and its impacts expose systematic disadvantages for women within maquila labor structures, both in the form of their wages and their lack of opportunity for

upward growth within the company. These realities result from the cyclical devaluation and disposal of female workers by maquila employers. With that said, maquila labor structures mirror the devaluation of women in Mexican society. Therefore, increases in women's activism since the adoption of free trade policies may indirectly result in a cultural revolution, one that transforms victim-blaming narratives and the cultural and economic disposability of women. Women's activism in Northern Mexico educates maquila workers on their labor rights and fights against the abuses of human rights as constructed by neoliberal economic policies and labor structures.

As the next chapter will highlight, neoliberal policies directly impacted populations of Northern Mexico due to their proximity to the U.S.. Because NAFTA boosted Mexico's manufacturing industry and promoted maquiladora construction at the Northern border, Northern populations experience the product of neoliberalism first hand. This is not to say that Southern populations do not experience the impacts of neoliberalism, however the Southern experience is based on the Mexican government's neglect of land reforms, public resources and social protections that directly impact their lives. Northern Mexico is heavily exposed to foreign capital, industrial advancements, and globalization, whereas Southern Mexico does not experience the same level of neoliberal intrusion. The preceding chapter identified the women's activism that has developed under neoliberal economic policies and labor structures. In the case of Northern Mexico, neoliberalism may have inspired this wave of activism given that maquila activists fight against the by-product of Mexican neoliberal political reform. The following chapter will use a similar analysis to observe the role of neoliberal policies in women's activism of Southern Mexico.

CHAPTER TWO

Southern Mexico: Zapatismo, Activism, and Gender Equality

The impacts of neoliberalism on Southern Mexico may not be as straightforward as its influence in Northern Mexico, however, Mexico's shift to a neoliberal economic policy resulted in the dispersion of public resources and land reforms that greatly impacted Southern populations. As discussed in the historical analysis above, anti-globalization, anti-capitalist, anti-establishment sentiment grew from the government's political decisions, ultimately leading to rebellion of the indigenous, rural poor of the South. In many ways, this movement became a vehicle for women's rights activism. The following chapter will discuss the evolution of the Zapatista-led Southern rebellion and its relation to neoliberalism, the role of women within the movement, and how women's rights and gender equality may exist as a by-product of anti-neoliberal sentiment. Additionally, I will explore the modern-day realities and practices of gender equality to analyze the significance of women's rights activism within Zapatista-occupied Mexico. Many of the conclusions gathered from this analysis are guided by the testimonies of Zapatista women published in the works of Hilary Klein, Shannon Speed, R. Aída Hernández Castillo, and Lynn M. Stephen.

a. The female journey under Zapatismo

Upon the public debut of the Zapatistas in 1994, images of women in ski masks holding wooden guns filled the front pages of international news outlets and online blogs. Due to the paradox of traditional femininity that these images created, the Zapatista movement gained international traction from leftist organizations, and stood out as the first gender-inclusive rebellion of its time. The Zapatistas primarily promote indigenous rights and anti-capitalist, anti-establishment sentiment, while also including women's rights within their ideology. The following pages will explore the journey of female representation within the Zapatista movement, setbacks that Zapatista women have faced, and how Zapatista communities practice gender equality in the modern day.

Although the EZLN started as a male-only organization, women eventually joined the organization and mobilization of Zapatismo, therefore aiding in the growth of the movement's size and impact. Many factors play into the eagerness of indigenous women to join the EZLN: lack of land ownership, the educational influence of the Church on indigenous women, and the development of women's rights knowledge are just some of the aspects that led to female recruitment for the EZLN.

Prior to the introduction of the EZLN, political representation and participation was limited for women due to the strength of the ejido society alongside traditional male centered land ownership. Ejido laws, as they existed before 1971, stated that women could have land ownership only if they were mothers or widows maintaining their families. Although the gendered policies of ejido land ownership shifted to where women over twenty-one could inherit land, traditional structures maintained predominantly male land ownership and inheritance (Speed, et al., 2006). Landowners were given political power, therefore what resulted was a

male-dominated local government. Although some women could vote in ejido assemblies, it was rare to see any notable form of female representation, let alone women's rights activism, in the political sphere.

Indigenous women started to find their political voice upon the integration of Catholic dioceses within Chiapas communities in the 1960's. Religious leaders such as Bishop Samuel Ruiz worked alongside indigenous women, aiming to incorporate Biblical messages of justice and strength into the daily lives of these women. "'It's all in there: how to organize, how they did it, that they had to endure hunger as well, just like us'...Working with the diocese was a key building block for Ernestina and many other Zapatista women." (Klein, 2015). In 1987, the Comisión Diocesana de Mujeres (Women's Commission of the Diocese) brought women's groups together within indigenous villages with an aim to align Biblical messages of female contributions with the treatment of women within their own environment. One Zapatista insurgent woman explained how political awareness informed many women about their individual gender rights: "The women in the communities were very happy, because we had never had the political consciousness to address how much women suffer, how mistreated women are." (Klein, 2015).

Despite the formation of the EZLN in 1983, the organization did not recruit women until plans of rebellion were in the works in the years leading up to January 1, 1994. The first wave of these female recruits was informed of the movement by their male spouse or family members who were already a part of the organization. These women started attending meetings and eventually went through educational training in order to fully understand the injustices the EZLN was fighting against (Klein, 2015). Further, physical training took place when recruits became

insurgents and moved to the EZLN camps in the hills. As educational and physical training continued, female participation in the EZLN increased due to the outreach of female insurgents. Notable Zapatista women such as Major Ana Maria visited fellow indigenous women of the villages they had left behind to inform them of the actions being taken to combat injustices against impoverished, indigenous communities. Not only did these female insurgents inform fellow indigenous women, but they inspired them to follow the path to freedom: "'Some women told us that if we hadn't been there, other women would not have joined,' said Major Ana Maria. 'Because of our participation, they saw that women can do this too, and more women began to join. The women in the villages began to tell their daughters, sisters, or granddaughters, 'Pick up a gun and go fight.'" (Klein, 2015).

Many female insurgents saw recruitment missions as an opportunity to enlighten other women about the realities of women's rights within the villages. One Zapatista recruit explained: "Insurgent women came to talk to us about our lives and everything that we experienced as women." She continued on by saying: "We talked about why women have so much work. They came to teach us what our rights are, that all women have the right to speak up, to participate, to read and write. They helped us study politics and a critique of the government. We learned many things from them." (Klein, 2015). The EZLN provided a sense of freedom for indigenous women of Chiapas, not only from the discrimination against indigenous peoples as a whole, but also from the trials and tribulations of the indigenous women's lifestyle. As stated by one Zapatista woman; "They were going to marry me off without telling me anything about it. When I found out, I preferred to leave rather than staying. I didn't want to marry that man; I was still very young." (Klein, 2015) Given the conditions of their daily life under hegemonic gender structures,

the lifestyle of an EZLN insurgent was intriguing and provided hope for the future in the form of physical, educational, and political development.

Female insurgent recruiters spoke of the EZLN insurgent camps in terms of gender equality that indigenous women of Chiapas had never experienced before. One could argue that this had to do with the sheer number of bodies the EZLN needed in order to have a notably successful revolution. When women were treated equally as militants, regardless of their gender, the EZLN grew its army force's physical and intellectual base. Female insurgents sacrificed their livelihood of the past in order to join the EZLN, therefore newfound experiences of gender equality built their confidence in the movement and encouraged them to continue recruiting. Practiced gender equality within the camps therefore had a ripple effect and resulted in more female recruits. When female insurgents visited the villages and told others of their experiences of equality alongside male insurgents, Zapatista hopefuls could realistically imagine themselves in the role of an EZLN insurgent.

In terms of female participation in the EZLN rebellion, indigenous women made up about a third of the insurgents in the rebellion and additionally aided in radio operations and nursing positions (Klein, 2015). Apart from front-line confrontations with Mexican soldiers, women played a role in communicating with the outside world. Through their interactions with reporters and foreigners at EZLN national peace talks, forums, and press-related events following the rebellion, women helped to relay the needs of the indigenous community and the mission of the Zapatistas (Speed, et al., 2006). Comandanta Ramona and Comandanta Esther stood as notable female leaders of the EZLN due to their contributions to Zapatista public statements and policies. Major Ana Maria, whose testimonies are frequently cited in this thesis, held positions of

responsibility, militancy, and leadership for the EZLN. The women of the EZLN existed as both militant and conceptual leaders within the rebellion. With that being said, it is vital to identify the role of women in the image of the Zapatista movement. Although the prominence of female representation in media coverage of the rebellion promoted aspects of gender equality within the Zapatistas, mainstream imagery that arose from the front lines may not have painted a realistic picture of how Zapatista communities practice gender equality.

b. Gender equality through the lens of Zapatismo

Having discussed female participation during the EZLN rebellion, it is important to identify the elements of gender equality within Zapatismo ideology and practice, and how this movement influenced indigenous women's rights movements. As stated previously, EZLN recruitment provided indigenous women with educational experiences and an outlet for personal freedom. With more education about their individual rights, indigenous women saw Zapatismo as an opportunity to incorporate gender equality into a movement fighting for race and class equality. Because Zapatismo brought activism to indigenous communities, advocates for women's rights within the movement promoted changes in "traditional" elements of the indigenous lifestyle that once excluded and oppressed them (Hernández Castillo, 2002)

The concrete documentation of women's rights within the Zapatista movement is the Women's Revolutionary Law. This law stands out as the main, written reflection of Zapatista women's demands within the movement. The Women's Revolutionary Law surfaced in The Mexican Awakener [*El Despertador Mexicano*] upon the public debut of the EZLN, in conjunction with the uprising. The law demands the following:

> First--Women, regardless of their race, creed, color or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in any way that their desire and capacity determine.
>
> Second--Women have the right to work and receive a just salary.
>
> Third--Women have the right to decide the number of children they have and care for.
>
> Fourth--Women have the right to participate in the matters of the community and have charge if they are free and democratically elected.
>
> Fifth--Women and their children have the right to Primary Attention in their health and nutrition.
>
> Sixth--Women have the right to education.
>
> Seventh--Women have the right to choose their partner and are not obliged to enter into marriage.
>
> Eighth--Women have the right to be free of violence from both relatives and strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished.
>
> Ninth--Women will be able to occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.
>
> Tenth--Women will have all the rights and obligations which the revolutionary laws and regulations give.
>
> (Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Laws, 1994)

For many of the indigenous women of Chiapas, the inclusion of women's rights into the Zapatista manifesto was a deciding factor in their involvement in the rebellion. Before the Women's Revolutionary Law, indigenous women were subjected to a lack of control over the decisions of their daily lives. Zapatismo provided a form of personal autonomy they hadn't seen before. For instance, in regards to Article 3 of the Women's Revolutionary Law, Zapatista women of San Francisco stated that using birth control did not mean that "they were rejecting motherhood, but that they wanted their pregnancies to be spaced further apart so they could have time to recover" (Speed, et al., 2006). In this sense, not only do the Articles of the Women's

Revolutionary Law recognize female liberation, but they also take into account women's health concerns that had previously gone unrecognized.

Although the Women's Revolutionary Law was a written acknowledgement of women's rights within the Zapatista movement, it did not hold the same weight as the declarations and participation for the indigenous rights sentiments that the movement carried as a whole. This became clear as the Mexican military executed invasions and relocations of indigenous peasants and rebels of Eastern Chiapas. As physical combat, casualties, and the presence of Mexican military personnel increased, the priorities of EZLN insurgents shifted towards organization and local defense of indigenous peoples and away from the women's rights laid out by the Women's Revolutionary Law (Speed, et al, 2006). The impact of the Women's Revolutionary Law, its enforceability, and the reality of gender equality in modern day Chiapas are discussed further in section *d* of this chapter: "Setbacks to achieving gender equality".

c. Female empowerment and progress in society

Despite the broader prioritization of collective indigenous rights and objectives towards the end of the EZLN rebellion of 1994, Zapatista women took the Women's Revolutionary Law into their own hands by expanding their political voice through participation in local governments. Additionally, female representatives of the EZLN assumed roles of responsibility in Zapatista/indigenous national boards and women's cooperatives. Ultimately, the Zapatismo movement opened doors to the expansion of feminist thinking within indigenous communites therefore providing women with opportunities of leadership and exposure to the outside world.

Prior to the public debut of the EZLN, the roles of indigenous women within communities of Southern Mexico fell into a hegemonic, traditional category. As stated by Maria Angelica, a Zapatista woman of San Francisco, Chiapas, Zapatismo ignited a flame of activism in indigenous women:

> Before we became Zapatistas, there was nothing that would move us. We just sat there, as always. We didn't know if we had it in us to take part, if we had the courage, if we could carry out work or form some kind of collective. But when the struggle began, that was when women started to know how to do things, how we could have freedom, how we could relate to men. (Speed, et al., 2006)

Since the EZLN rebellion of 1994, indigenous women have established organizations, collectives and co-ops which aim to promote women's rights within the indigenous rights movement. In 1997, The National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women (CNMI), a nationwide organization of women from upwards of twenty different indigenous communities throughout Mexico, formed. Their aim was to:

> "strengthen indigenous women's leadership from a gender perspective; establish a communication network of indigenous women at the national level; provide skills training for indigenous women at the national level; raise funds to implement regional development, training, and service projects for indigenous communities; sensitize indigenous peoples on indigenous women's human rights, utilizing a gender analysis…" (Hernández Castillo, 2002)

Although the CNMI has not publicly declared itself as a 'feminist' organization, it aims to better the lives of indigenous women in terms of gender inequality and provide a space within the national indigenous struggle for women to identify and fight for their specific demands as women. Participation in CNMI events provides indigenous women with the opportunity to

engage in activism and political conversation while branching out from their own communities. While the organization of the EZLN exposed indigenous women to the world outside of their community via recruitment missions and educational training, opportunities to spread the message of Zapatismo and incorporate those who were not involved in the rebellion into the movement after the rebellion took place also broadened the exposure of indigenous women to the outside world. Both before, during, and after the rebellion, Zapatismo played a critical role in the integration of indigenous women into modern, more progressive thinking.

Indigenous women also found opportunities of empowerment within the formation of co-ops. Based primarily in handicrafts and textile production, women of Chiapas established female-led organizations such as Women Who Weave, a Teotitlan based co-op aimed to support individual indigenous textile producers through the creation of outside markets. Although Women Who Weave dissolved in 1988, its founders ended up creating five branches of the co-op which expanded the production of traditional textiles, boosted income for indigenous women, and spread awareness about the women's movements that emerged from Zapatismo. Co-ops that centered around female vendors gave indigenous women the opportunity to leave their communities, sell their textiles (or other hand-made goods), and create their own markets for clients outside of the idnigenous communities. Ultimately, co-ops provided economic independence for women of Chiapas, which therefore pushed them to involve themselves further in leadership positions within both the co-op and, on a greater scale, local politics.

Apart from the boost in female empowerment and participation in indigenous organizations, local politics, and co-ops, Zapatismo promoted certain infrastructural changes that supported the wellbeing of indigneous women. Upon the rebellion of the EZLN, many

plantation-style farmlands of Southern Mexico that were previously owned by either the Mexican government or landowning elite, were infiltrated and taken over by EZLN insurgents. Zapatista occupation of these farmlands contributed to total agricultural goods and cultivable land for these indigenous communities. Reclamation of indigenous land and a shift toward local sustainability and subsistence agriculture had positive impacts on hunger rates and promoted collective agricultural production in Zapatista-occupied communities (Speed, et al, 2006). Although this infrastructural advance for Zapatista municipales promoted agricultural production for all its members, including women, one specific regulation of Zapatista ideology, the prohibition of alcohol, formed a sense of security for indigenous women specifically.

During the formation of Zapatista caracoles following the EZLN rebellion, prohibition of alcohol was inherited into the structure of each community. Prohibition was a concept designed to uphold local sustainability and prioritize the interests of community prosperity, however it especially benefited women due to the decline of domestic abuse:

> "Men used to drink a lot before, and then they would hit their wives. When this struggle was taking shape, it was decided that drink was not a good thing, that there should be no more drinking, because from drink comes the mistreatment of the companera, the partner, and the mistreatment of the children." (Speed, et al, 2006)

As noted by interviewed Zapatista women, alcohol was an instigator for gender based violence prior to the Zapatismo movement. Prohibition of alcohol did not completely subdue the physical abuse of women (as will be discussed in the following pages), but it played a role in suppressing violence within the caracoles. The improvement of women's wellbeing was also guided and upheld by allies and supporters outside the Zapatista region.

The global reach of the EZLN rebellion produced an inward flow of attention and action from international NGOs and foreign visitors into Chiapas. The presence of these outsiders within the caracoles ignited infrastructural and political advancements, both of which benefited indigneous women. On one hand, national and international organizations utilized their capital advantage to aid the Zapatista communities in building a new water system. Because women were usually the ones fetching water from local rivers or water sources, this newfound infrastructural advancement saved them time and labor and ensured clean water for them and their families (Speed, et al, 2006). On the other hand, the presence of outsiders who were fascinated with the level of female participation in the EZLN ignited conversation, boosted revenues for women's co-ops, and aided in spreading the vision of Zapatista women in regards to their activism for women's rights within their community (Speed, et al, 2006). With this being said, it is important to acknowledge the possible unrealistic perspectives of the Zapatistas that outsiders may hold due to skewed media coverage. Though this thesis does not center around media coverage and response, a critical analysis of Zapatista-related content could open doors for future studies.

d. Setbacks to achieving gender equality

Although time and research constraints restrict my ability to delve completely into the realities of Zapatista-occupied Chiapas, this thesis seeks to question the status of women's rights and "feminism" within the EZLN rebellion as well as the Zapatista caracoles of the modern day. In this regard, the media comes up as an actor that may play a role in morphing outsiders' understanding of the Zapatistas, their history, and their day to day lives. Common rhetoric and

imagery for the EZLN rebellion paints the Zapatistas as a indigenous rights group with a strong female presence. Women in traditional garb, wearing ski masks and carrying wooden guns, seem to be the most common physical representation of the Zapatistas from an outsider's perspective. Though this is a real image, it does not accurately represent the reality of the Zapatistas as a whole. The cultivation of this "feminist" image was used by reporters, media outlets, and bloggers much more regularly, perhaps unknowingly, due to its irregularity. Images of female militants on the front lines are abnormal in relation to stereotypical Western ideas about indigenous women. Therefore, the media utilized this obscurity to expand viewership and the overall impact of their content. The EZLN may have been one of the first indigenous movements with a female armed militia, however this does not indicate just practices of gender equality in Zapatista-occupied Chiapas.

Having brought into question the actual practices of gender equality within the Zapatista caracoles, I seek to explore the factors that have kept Zapatista communities from achieving gender equality, despite the influence of women's rights within Zapatismo. Some of these factors are a result of how the rebellion played out, whereas others form based on traditional indigenous values. The following investigation and analysis may lead the reader to make general conclusions about all Zapatistas, however I acknowledge that this analysis may not represent the status of gender equality among all existing Zapatista caracoles because my selected testimonies cover only a small portion of Zapatista women and communities.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Mexican government initially met the EZLN rebellion with military force in the occupied regions. Mexican military presence not only pushed the goals of the Women's Revolutionary Law aside to make room for EZLN defense and

organization strategy, it also resulted in gender based violence against indigenous women. Abuse and sex crimes on behalf of the Mexican military was a form of punishment for the rebellion that ultimately resulted in the reenforcements of traditional gender roles. These crimes functioned as a roundabout way to penalize activists and aim a message toward indigenous men in their families and organizations to "maintain order" (Hernández Castillo, 2002). The continued military presence well after the rebellion in Zapatista-occupied towns like San Francisco maintained fear and traditional gender roles within indigenous society (Speed, et al, 2006). The stagnation in Zapatismo's progress at this time reflected onto women's inability to organize for their rights.

While the indigenous rights movement led by the EZLN struggled for national recognition and change, the indigenous women of this same movement were fighting an additional battle of their own. What some scholars consider "double-militancy" takes form for Zapatista women in their fight for indigenous *and* women's rights (Hernández Castillo, 2002). Not only were these women combatting the large-scale race and class discrimination from the Mexican government, they also confronted gender discrimination taking place within their own community. This brings to light the individual versus collective binary that exists so prominently within the female Zapatista struggle. While the collective identity of Zapatismo acknowledges the needs of individual identities, the struggle for collective, indigenous rights takes precedence and overshadows the struggle for individual, women's rights. Consequently, as Speed et al note, "these women struggle to change gendered relations of power in the cultural context of their communities while simultaneously defending the right of the community to define for themselves what that cultural context is and will be." (Speed, et al, 2006)

The EZLN acknowledged this idea of "double-militancy" for women of the movement in one of their communiques which reads:

> "Zapatista women, both combatant and noncombatant, are fighting for their own rights as women. In addition, they face the macho culture of Zapatista men, which is expressed in different ways. Zapatista women are not free because they are Zapatistas; they still have a long way to go and a lot to gain. We understand this is not a struggle against men, but a struggle for women's rights." (Speed, et al, 2006)

Although this declaration recognizes the individual struggle of Zapatista women, it does not identify the specific practices that uphold gender binaries and inequalities within Zapatista communities. As stated by one Zapatista woman, "many men say that they understand and support women's demands, but this understanding seems to evaporate the instant they find it is their own wives, sisters, or daughters who have an opinion, who participate in meetings and assemblies, who are part of a project." (Speed, et al, 2006). The intentions of Zapatismo may create opportunities for women within the movement, however, in practice, members of the community continue to uphold a sense of hypocrisy.

Despite Zapatismo's acknowledgment of women's rights and the additional discriminatory struggles that exist for Zapatista women, practices of gender equality remain inconsistent in Zapatista-occupied spaces. As an ideology, Zapatismo existed and organized within indigenous communities well before its public debut in 1994. In other words, the movement is not particularly "new" to the Southern region of Mexico. Nevertheless, traditional thought prevails within many Zapatista communities, therefore leaving Zapatista women to remain symbolically, politically, and economically inferior to their male counterparts. Because of the strength of traditional values within indigenous societies of Southern Mexico, a shift in the

collective mindset may take generations. Upon mentioning the idea of changing the traditional roles of men and women, one San Francisco man stated: “No I don’t think it can be done. Well, I could grind corn, but I could not make tortillas. I could not stand the smoke.” (Speed, et al, 2006). In this particular community, the mentality of traditionally “female” roles has not fully transformed despite the fact that men may be contributing to domestic tasks more frequently in the most recent years since the rebellion.

It may take generations to shift the domestic and symbolic roles associated with women versus the political leadership associated with men. As stated by a Zapatista woman at an Indigenous Women’s Meeting: “We have been taught since we were little girls to do as we were told, to be quiet, not to talk back, to put up and shut up, to stay away from participation.” (Speed, et al, 2006). Despite the implementation of rights for women’s participation in local politics defined by the Women’s Revolutionary Law, traditional mindsets and fear of gossip keeps many women from participating, therefore holding these societies back from “complete” practices of gender equality. Rumors that uphold stereotypical gender roles tend to come to rise about women who pursue positions of power, and their husbands who may or may not allow their participation. In these instances, power dynamics within the couple come into question and the lack of “control” of the man over “his woman” reflects on that man’s ability to perform a stereotypical male role: “The local representation of femininity is tightly linked to the representation of masculinity, to the parameters and stereotypes of what it is to be a ‘good man’.” (Speed, et al, 2006). Changes in the allowance of women to participate and hold leadership positions within local politics and community assemblies comes as a shock to many members of indigenous

communities who were raised under completely different discourses and expect gender binaries to remain intact.

The reasoning behind women's barriers to leadership takes many forms, whether it be their relationship status, their age, or their perceived inability to lead:

> Some argue that it is difficult for a woman to get chosen since married women already have many responsibilities and most do not wish to add to their already heavy schedules or think that they might not do a good job. In other instances, the husband may not be willing, since it would mean that his wife might "neglect her housework." On the other hand, unmarried women, who have more free time and fewer duties, are perceived by the community as "too young, unknowledgeable, shy, afraid of gossip, and irresponsible," or as "only looking for a boyfriend; once they catch a man, they get married and forget about work." (Speed, et al, 2006)

This excerpt brings up a double standard for women within indigenous communities. If they reject marriage and focus on their leadership and political participation, they are perceived to be inexperienced and uncommitted, but if they take up leadership while being married, they will not be prioritizing the "women's work" that is seen as more important than political participation.

It is not only men holding women back from leadership positions. These communities preserve traditional attitudes, and many women uphold the stereotypical gender roles they are accustomed to. Although Zapatismo brought a new way of thinking with opportunities for women that differed from what was traditionally expected of them, today there is not necessarily a communal sentiment among all women about their potential economic, political, and symbolic progress. As stated by Maria Angelica, a Zapatista woman of San Francisco, Chiapas,

> … we are not all the same, and not everyone understands. Some women do understand their importance, but others think differently, they don't believe they have rights, they feel there is

> nothing they can do. I was afraid to participate too. My voice would tremble when I spoke, and I stuttered. (Speed, et al, 2006)

Zapatismo has helped to broaden the understanding and reach of women's rights and gender equality within Chiapas and other primarily indigenous states of Southern Mexico, however the concept of female leadership has not completely integrated into some of these societies with a strong foundation of indigenous traditions and values. Much of the lack of female participation in local politics or community meetings aligns with gender-based codes of respect upheld by traditional thinking and practices (Speed, et al, 2006). Specifically in San Francisco, Chiapas, traditional ceremonies would separate men and women, and men historically held the municipal assembly while women congregated around other focuses of the community such as health and water resources. Nonetheless, some Zapatista women align their lack of inclusion in modern day leadership and assembly with "machismo" attitudes from their male counterparts that ultimately lessens their confidence and participation (Speed, et al, 2006).

Aspects of indigenous traditions that segregated the genders brings in a new debate in regards to the autonomy of Zapatista-occupied regions of Southern Mexico. While Zapatismo aims to create an autonomous space free of race discrimination from the Mexican government (specifically against indigenous populations), its focus on the collective rights of indigenous people pulls away from the individual rights of women within the movement who are fighting a battle of their own. Some feminist critics say that the preservation of indigenous society may lead to further gender discrimination against women. Because traditional values of these indigenous societies solidify the gender binary and stereotypical roles of women, cultural preservation could be seen as a roadblock for women's rights movements within these societies

(Speed, et al, 2006). This poses an interesting point of concern for femenist activists who want to confront the negation of indegenous women's individual rights while not overstepping their boundaries and criticizing the cultural and collective indigenous rights movement that indigenous women are actively a part of. Traditional practices in these societies can consist of arranged marriage, exclusion of women from political participation, and male-line inheritance of land, therefore some Mexican feminists argue that autonomy would uphold these practices and prolong the symbolic, political, and economic progress of women (Speed, et al, 2006).

When discussing the debate between collective and individual rights for indigenous women of Southern Mexico, it is important to acknowledge the Westernized, urbanized, imperialist thought process that can turn to indigenous culture as the "problem" or source of gender inequality. While some of the traditional practices mentioned above uphold gender roles and segregate men and women within indigenous societies, this does not mean that gender inequality is caused by traditional practices, nor does it mean that indegenous women's rights go unignored and unsupported by individuals within these societies. The use of modern, urban feminist beliefs as the bar at which indigenous women's rights movements must be set implies that, as Speed et al note, "individuals in indigenous communities are in need of external protection from the civilized Mexican state to keep the cultural collective from running amok." (2006). This discourse further supports an imperialist, "white savior" complex that debilitates and downplays the ability of indigenous women to fight for their rights from within their own communities.

Comandanta Esther, a female leader of the Zapatistas known for her ideological contributions and public appearances, spoke out about the relation between *costumbres*, or

traditions, and women's rights within indigenous society in her 2001 address to Mexican Congress:

> We know which are good and which are bad *usos y costumbres.* The bad ones are hitting and beating a woman, … marrying by force against her will, not being allowed to participate in assembly, not being able to leave the house … It is very important for us, the indigenous women of all of Mexico, … to be recognized and respected as the women and indigenous people we are. (Esther, 2001)

It is important when analyzing the impacts of traditional thought and practice on the progress of gender equality and women's rights in indigenous spaces, that the traditions and mistreatment are not grouped together. Comandanta Esther speaks for the Zapatistas in saying that indigenous culture can be respected and practiced while still fighting for the rights of women and upholding individual human rights.

After reviewing the presence and practice of women's rights and gender equality within Zapatismo, one can conclude that the "double-militancy" for indigenous women of the Zapatista movement creates a dynamic that results in an individual versus collective interdependence. Zapatismo recognizes women's rights as well as the additional, individual struggle that exists for indigenous women within the collective struggle for indigenous rights. Zapatismo has also created opportunities for indigenous women to (1) make demands for their wellbeing (as stated in the Women's Revolutionary Law), (2) get involved in local government, cooperatives, and national indigenous organizations, and (3) broaden their education and exposure to urban environments via EZLN training and travel opportunities. Given the tools for women's progress provided by Zapatismo, as well as the setbacks and roadblocks discussed in the previous section, the following pages will explore the reality of gender equality in Zapatista-occupied regions.

Apart from an increase in women's political participation, Zapatismo has created positive changes in women's day to day freedoms, experiences and interactions with men in recent years. In regards to the social changes for women since the 1994 rebellion, one woman from a Zapatista-occupied community stated:

> Women were like chickens, locked up in the kitchen. Before I was married, I had to ask my father's permission to leave the house to visit my relatives. After I married, I had to ask my husband's permission if I wanted to go visit my mother or to go into town, so he would know who I was with… Now, women are free to go to meetings to learn, and the only thing stopping them is their own fear. (Speed, et al, 2006)

While this statement may not ring true for all women of Southern Mexico, increases in women's personal freedoms and decreases in the control of those freedoms by men creates an environment where gender equality can be achieved. As stated previously, educational opportunities for women, in the form of Zapatista meetings and training, subsequently expanded women's connection with their own independence, individuality, and personal freedoms.

Alongside women's newfound liberty from their husbands' control over social freedom, a new way of thinking emerged for unmarried women within the Zapatista movement. Zapatismo promotes independence and self-sustainability within its ideology, and these ideals permeated into the lifestyles of indigenous women in the form of non-traditional marriage timelines and arrangements:

> It has become normal to find young women of twenty-one or twenty-two who are still single (until ten years ago, Tzeltal women married between the ages of fourteen and sixteen) and who consider marriage a limitation on their participation. The norm now is that young men and women choose their spouses rather than their parents choosing for them. (Speed, et al, 2006)

The presence of Zapatismo within Southern regions of Mexico implies that it's ideology reflects into the organization and practices of indigenous societies. As stated by Article 7 of the Women's Revolutionary Law, "women have the right to choose their partner and are not obliged to enter into marriage" (Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Laws, 1994). Abstaining from marriage or refusing an arranged marriage was once considered breaking tradition and was prohibited for women. Today, indigenous women normalize these practices and integrate their independence into the social organization of Zapatista-occupied regions.

As discussed previously, gender roles in domestic labor are still very much a part of indigenous societies of Southern Mexico. Men typically work in the fields while women typically execute the domestic work at home. As a result of the Zapatista rebellion, however, there has been a shift in the management of these domestic tasks that were previously considered the responsibility of women on the whole. The magnitude of domestic work that women were previously required to complete is now recognized as the responsibility of the household. From one husband's perspective, "if I finish early with my work, I can help. Women have a lot of work, and there are things we can help with." (Speed, et al, 2006). While this arrangement may not reflect Western understanding of "complete" gender equality, the intention to ease and recognize the extent of women's domestic workload is progress in the journey towards an equal household dynamic.

Apart from women's domestic labor, the organization of women's work cooperatives opens up doors to economic opportunities and discoveries of personal freedoms outside of the household. That being said, many women who were already married and child-bearing before the Zapatista uprising feel that they do not have time to take part in these projects. Some of this

sentiment may result from pressures within the household from their husbands. Testimony from a married woman of a Chiapas cooperative stated, “my husband tells me to leave the shop, he thinks since I am married people are going to think that he is too meek, that he has no authority” (Speed, et al, 2006). Not only do some women feel they do not have time to participate in cooperatives due to their domestic labor, the opinions of their husbands and other members of the community also hold women back from pursuing work opportunities outside the household. Female independence as a result of cooperative work alters the traditional household structure, therefore causing men to feel inferior. Gossip plays a role in this male inferiority: the male ego can be fragile and if women are “too empowered” the community may see this as a reflection of a husband’s “lack of authority” over his wife.

Despite the inclusion of the Women’s Revolutionary Law in the manifesto of the EZLN rebellion, in practice the demands of this law are not necessarily a reality within indigenous organizations. Observations of a 2001 National Indigenous Congress (CNI) assembly in Michoacan, Mexico state as follows:

> With the Zapatista leadership present, indigenous women activists achieved the creation of a women’s panel. Despite the commitment by the CNI leadership, when the discussion began, many indigenous leaders insisted that this space be opened to the participation of men. Purepecha, Mixtec, Zapotec and Chocholtec women patiently explained to their male *compañeros* that their initiative did not intend to divide the CNI, but rather to provide a strategy for creating a supportive context in which indigenous women, who are mainly monolingual, could express their feelings. A male Purepecha leader interrupted the discussion by abruptly grabbing the microphone from the coordinator of the panel and insisting that the audience turn to “more serious issues.” (Hernández Castillo, 2002)

The first and ninth articles of the Women's Revolutionary Law ensure women the right to political mobilization, participation and organization within Zapatismo (Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Laws, 1994). That being said, the lack of prioritization, or rather, the lack of recognition of the women's panel and its concerns during this assembly goes against the women's rights granted under the Women's Revolutionary Law. In this context, women's individual rights and concerns are not being included in, nor heard, by the collective movement. The instability of gender equality and the lack of respect for the Women's Revolutionary Law within the top tier of Zapatista political organizations is telling for what the status of gender equality may be in lower, more local political organizations of Zapatista communities.

The Women's Revolutionary Law within Zapatismo aims to create security, independence, and political opportunities, among other established rights, for women. Prior to the Zapatista rebellion, domestic abuse posed a threat to indigenous women who didn't have an outlet to stand up for their rights and personal safety. Article 8 of the Women's Revolutionary Law grants women "the right to be free of violence from both relatives and strangers" and ensures punishment for acts of abuse, rape or attempted rape (Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Laws, 1994). Following the rebellion, new community rules opened up spaces for women to confront instances of abuse and order proper punishment on their abusers, however, fear of retaliation holds some women back from exercising these rights (Speed, et al, 2006). The installation of new, anti-violence policies in Zapatista spaces spread awareness and educated the community about the rights and wrongs of how women are to be treated according to the Women's Revolutionary Law. Nonetheless, as one Zapatista woman describes, domestic abuse and mistreatment of women persisted in some communities:

> Some men appear to understand now, some have stopped mistreating women, but some seem to keep going. But women know what their rights are, and what they can do if they are mistreated. Some might not know, and may still be beaten by their husbands. Who knows? But today we know how to defend ourselves, and if women fail to report mistreatment to the authorities, they have only themselves to blame. (Speed, et al, 2006)

It is difficult to conclude on the change in rates of domestic abuse before and after Zapatismo due to the fact that an unknown amount of instances of violence go unreported. Although women in these communities may be aware of their rights and know what to do if those rights are abused, this does not ensure that a woman being abused will feel comfortable reporting their abuser. With this being said, one cannot claim that Zapatismo has solved the problem of domestic abuse of women. The intention to practice gender equality exists within Zapatismo, however, gendered power dynamics, traditional thinking, and a lack of enforceability for the articles of the Women's Revolutionary Law keep this intention from becoming a reality.

In time, all members of Zapatista communities may eventually uphold and practice the demands of the Women's Revolutionary Law, however this will require an evolution of traditional, hegemonic mindsets. With that said, developments in the autonomy and withdrawal of Zapatista caracoles from the capitalist, neoliberal government of Mexico will aid in the practice of gender equality. Although the Women's Revolutionary Law has not completely resonated into society and still lacks a level of practice and enforcement within the community, the demands of this law and its tribute to the wellbeing and equality of women is a symbolic step that will eventually permeate into the practices of Zapatista society. The devaluation and disregard of women and their rights within the indigenous rural South will gradually lift due to the distancing of the Zapatistas from social structures that uphold gender inequality. Ultimately,

we can recognize Zapatismo as a vehicle for the betterment of women's wellbeing and equality, even if it has not yet reached its full potential. Given the role of neoliberalism in the growth and development of Zapatismo, one could argue that neoliberal policies and their effect on populations of the indigenous South indirectly resulted in the prominence of women's rights activism within the Zapatista movement. Multiple factors of Zapatista societal structure create setbacks for the achievement of gender equality, however their collective withdrawal from neoliberal, capitalist entities supports a shift toward the equality of the sexes.

VII. Conclusions:

a. Connecting the North and the South

Neoliberal policies play a significant role in the women's rights movements of both Northern and Southern Mexico. Perhaps both these regions incorporate anti-neoliberal sentiment into their movements, but the unique impacts of neoliberal policies produce different forms of activism that align with the respective experiences of each region. As Chapter One explored, the direct exposure of Northern Mexican women to neoliberal, capitalist labor structures influences their experiences as workers. The harsh working conditions and power dynamics produced by neoliberalism impact the physical, environmental, and financial well being of maquila workers. Despite the political and economic barriers that keep maquila workers from being compensated

for instances of abuse and exploitation, the growth of women's activism at the Northern border prevails as a by-product of Mexico's neoliberal regime. Activist groups and women's collectives seek justice for the mistreatment and discrimination against women both inside and outside the maquilas. Many of the groups discussed in this thesis aim to educate women about their labor rights as well as the corporate and cultural devaluation of women. Although the women of the North combat against actors with extreme economic and political power, their multifaceted, wide-spread approach to improving the treatment and wellbeing of women has gained international attention and support. These activists have experienced progress as well as setbacks to achieving gender equality in the workplace and within Mexicn culture, but as their fight continues, global awareness will spread.

Mexico's political shift to a neoliberal, capitalist economy produced a plethora of disadvantages for populations of the rural South. Since these new policies neglected the need for industrial and infrastructural investments in the South, anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist, anti-globalization sentiments emerged and encouraged the formation of Zapatismo. As Chapter Two identifies, Zapatismo brought a new wave of activism to Southern indigenous communities, those which sought political, economic, and social change. Although the movement prioritized the needs of the indigenous population as a whole, Zapatista women saw this newfound activism as an opportunity to promote women's individual rights and improve the practices of gender equality. The Women's Revolutionary Law stands out as concrete documentation of women's rights under Zapatismo. My research clarifies that Zapatista women are still fighting for the complete respect and practice of the Women's Revolutionary Law within their communities. Still, the transition into a society that practices complete gender equality is something that might

take generations. With that being said, the Zapatistas' continuous fight for autonomy from capitalist, neoliberal government structures assists and indirectly develops the underlying fight for gender equality within Zapatista communities.

This is where Chapter One and Chapter Two come together: The devaluation of women in Northern Mexico comes from neoliberal, capitalist labor structures that value low wages, high productivity, and the disposability of laborers. Because the Zapatista rebellion declared a withdrawal from neoliberalism, the movement subsequently rejected the devaluation of women by dominant powers. Northern and Southern Mexico remain distinct from one another due to their leading industries, demographics, and relationships with neoliberal policies and therefore the Mexican government. Women of the North live in environments consumed by the neoliberal agenda whereas women of the South exist within a movement that rejects neoliberal and capitalist ideals. In both the North and the South, women's activism fights against neoliberalism, whether it be directly through labor rights collectives or indirectly by using the fight for autonomy as a vehicle for individual rights.

It is equally important to note the distinct focus of each region's activism, despite the overarching connection to anti-neoliberalism between the two. By taking a multifaceted approach to the women's labor rights movement of the North, as discussed in Chapter One, maquiladora women confront the abuses of not only labor rights, but environmental rights *and* women's rights as human rights. These activists acknowledge the devaluation of women that exists beyond the walls of the maquila. Through education and social outreach, Northern activists strive to raise awareness about the disposability of women, all while improving working conditions and challenging neoliberal ideals.

Alternatively, the Zapatistas of the South upheld a more direct discourse against the neoliberalization of Mexico while incorporating awareness for indigenous people's rights. As Chapter Two acknowledges, this movement formed around autonomy as a way to avoid the possible effects of neoliberalization. As opposed to the reactionary activism of the North which fights against the by-product of neoliberalism as lived by maquila activists, the Zapatistas fought to divert the injection of neoliberalism into the Southern region. Because Southern Mexico does not experience the same relation to neoliberalism as the North, its activism is inherently different. With that being said, anti-neoliberal activism in both regions aligns with awareness for women's individual gender rights. While this connection may come across more obviously for the North due to the profound majority of female workers experiencing harsh working conditions, the underlying connection between the anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist sentiment of the Zapatistas and progress for women's wellbeing exists within the social structures created by capitalist regimes. As the end of Chapter Two describes, the continued fight for autonomy by Zapatista activists promises the improvement of women's wellbeing and the gradual destruction of gendered social structures.

Although Northern and Southern Mexico both experienced social and ideological progress for women's rights as a by-product of anti-neoliberal activism, in turn, both populations of women continue to experience setbacks in their fight for gender equality. In the North, these setbacks take form in economic and political power dynamics whereas in the South, age-old hegemonic thought persists among members of society due to the permanence of capitalist structures and misogynistic domination dating back to the colonial era. While it may take generations to dissolve these ideologies and power dynamics, activists of Northern and Southern

Mexico individually combat against the dominance of neoliberal regimes in their own unique form based on their political, economic, and demographic setting.

b. Final Thoughts

This thesis has posed thought-provoking questions and ideas, many of which open doors for future academic studies. Zapatismo stands out as a unique and modern ideology that inspires a wide range of scholarship, art, and media content. Factors ranging from colonial history to imagery and media coverage, all of which influence the progress and timeline of the Zapatista movement, prompt the visualization of future studies. More broadly speaking, neoliberal policies take effect in all corners of the globe, therefore influencing a wide range of populations, ideas, and industries. While this thesis focused on the differing role of neoliberal policies in women's activism between Northern and Southern Mexico, a similar method could be applied to various countries and populations around the world. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter Two, the media plays a prominent role in the success and global reach of Zapatismo. Future investigations could potentially observe the media's imagery and discourse about the Zapatistas as it pertains to the international perspectives of the movement. Furthermore, the Zapatistas' use of the internet to promote their movement's message could relate to the counter-forces' inability to distort public perception of Zapatismo. Because Zapatismo is the first anti-neoliberal, anti-establishment, anti-capitalist movement of its time, the opportunities for further study are endless.

The testimony within this thesis, from both women experiencing the brutal impacts of neoliberalism at the Northern border as well as those who are still fighting for autonomy and

gender equality on a local scale in the South, has influenced my understanding of international women's activism and the setbacks that accompany it. The opportunity to explore the realities of these populations from a third party perspective solidifies the necessary recognition of my privilege as a student. The statements and stories of these women reflect their hardships, but also their strength and perseverance, both of which come as an inspiration.

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