Under what conditions does women's participation in armed movements lead to a lasting transformation of gender roles?

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A tale of conflict and empowerment:

Unraveling the conditions for lasting gender role transformation

RQ: *Under what conditions does women's participation in armed movements lead to a lasting transformation of gender roles?*

Bachelor Thesis – Social Movements and Political Violence

BSc. International Relations and Organizations

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Date: 26th May 2023

Word count: 7953

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1. Introduction

"[…] do not let your light die out. Even if ours is extinguished here with our blood, and even if it is extinguished elsewhere, you take care of yours because, although times are difficult now, we have to continue being what we are: we are women who fight."[1]

In our contemporary society, the social sphere dominated by armed conflict is considered a male entity (Kennedy-Pipe, 2017, pp. 23–24). In contrast, the realm of daily life unaffected by armed conflict is constructed as a feminine entity (Elsthain, 1987; Goldstein, 2001; Woodward & Duncanson, 2017). Such constructions lead to a lack of public expectation for women to engage in combat (Kennedy-Pipe, 2017, p. 27). However, academic research indicates that the participation of women in armed conflict is not unusual (Elsthain, 1987; Goldstein, 2001; Kampwirth, 2002; Woodward & Duncanson, 2017). Women's participation in conflict is more prevalent within non-state armed groups than in state militaries (Marks, 2017, pp. 438–439). These groups recognize the importance of involving women in their movement to access a broader range of resources and larger support because, unlike state militaries, they do not have guaranteed financial sponsorship from the government (Marks, 2017, p. 438).

Armed groups frequently operate under a discourse of gender equality, providing women with expanded opportunities for economic independence and roles that were previously inaccessible (Meintjes et al., 2001, pp. 9–12). Nonetheless, the empowerment women gain from these experiences is temporary and lost in the aftermath of the conflict (see, Coulter, 2008; Dietrich Ortega, 2012; El-Bushra, 2003; Hale, 2001; Hilhorst, 2001; KC & Van Der Haar, 2019; Mazurana & Cole, 2013; Parpart, 2016; Viterna, 2014; Weber, 2021). Existing literature offers little guidance on what conditions might sustain gender role transformation once conflict ceases. However, it is essential to identify such conditions to promote a more just and equitable post-conflict society. Thus, the research question emerges: *Under what conditions does women's participation in armed movements lead to a lasting transformation of gender roles?*

Studies that investigate instances of gender role transformation attribute it to the agency of women (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015; Meintjes, 2001; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). Nevertheless, I argue that women's agency alone is insufficient, and identifying structural

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[1] Letter from the Zapatista women to women in struggle around the world (EZLN, 2019)

conditions that can facilitate transformation is necessary. My argument follows that structural conditions provide a foundation for women's agency and facilitate women's ability to enact change. While conflicts are diverse, and so are women, identifying such structures is critical because armed conflicts and women's participation in them persists. In my view, gendering this debate ensures a well-informed reintegration of women into society.

I propose three structural conditions that account for transformations in gender roles post-conflict. Each condition is embedded within a different level of analysis: international, national, and intra-movement levels. Through a case study approach of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Mexico, I conduct a congruence analysis to assess the plausibility of the identified conditions vis á vis the movement's gender role transformation. I find that each proposed condition complements one another, and changes at each level must occur for the transformation to last. Overall, these findings inform the development of gender role transformation and conflict theory.

2. Literature review

2.1. Equality's fallacy and gender as an ordering device

Women take on greater responsibilities and roles within their households and communities during times of violence (El-Bushra, 2003). They assume various roles, such as becoming the primary source of income in households where men are absent, taking on political positions at the community level, assuming administrative roles, or participating in armed movements (El-Bushra, 2003, p. 258). In the same way, women's contributions to armed movements vary widely. While some perform non-combatant tasks, such as delivering messages, cooking, cleaning, intelligence research, and organization of finances, others participate in bearing arms and fighting alongside men on the frontlines (Tarnaala, 2016, p. 1).

Women who participate in armed movements perceive themselves as being equal to men. For instance, the Nepalese Maoist movement exposed women to non-traditional gender roles and experiences. It gave them equal treatment and labor division opportunities regardless of race, caste, or class (KC & Van Der Haar, 2019, p. 435). Similarly, women combatants in the FMLN[2] army of El Salvador acquired new skills, gained independence, and were empowered in the fight against

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[2] Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional in Spanish or Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front for its translation to English.

the military dictatorship (Kampwirth, 2002, pp. 45–81). However, equality is often far from the truth. Including women in armed ranks is perceived as a temporary modification of gender relations rather than a fundamental change in societal norms (Alison, 2004, p. 458). Men may view female combatants as a 'threat' to their masculinity and may be unwilling to accept such a 'threat' beyond the context of violent conflict.

Understanding women's experiences in armed groups is impossible without understanding gender constructions (Cockburn, 2004, p. 24; Cohn, 2013, p. 1). Gender is a fundamental organizing factor in all societies (Alison, 2004, p. 460; Cohn, 2013, p. 11). Armed movements manipulate gender constructions to advance their revolutionary objectives (Dietrich Ortega, 2012, p. 490; Wilford, 1998, p. 2). Gender identities take a background role, and identities useful for the struggle are emphasized. To illustrate, nationalist armed movements emphasize national identities over gender identities. In these scenarios, women can bring forth their concerns as long as they align with movement goals; anything outside of this framework will not be tolerated (Dietrich Ortega, 2012, p. 503; Wilford, 1998, p. 8). The temporary dilution of gender as a divisive identity only occurs if it serves the interests of the armed movement. The pre-existing gender regime is reintroduced once the movement is dismantled.

In like manner, armed movements use gender as a tool to justify acts of violence (Viterna, 2014). For instance, women can fight and exert violence under the pretense of defending their homes and children. Simultaneously, men are granted the same rights under the justification of defending and protecting their women and children. As a consequence, women can only fight within a framework that upholds traditional gender roles and limits women's gender mobility (Bop, 2001, p. 33; Goldstein, 2001). Disruptions to the gender order are rejected in the aftermath, and a return to 'normal' is expected (Hale, 2001, pp. 138–139).

The above shows that armed movements' commitment to gender equality is questionable, as their priorities during the conflict differ from those in the post-conflict period. In this light, women's participation is merely a means to an end rather than an end itself. The goal is not equality but political gains. Armed movements use gender as an ordering and strategic tool. To understand the aim of this research, it is essential to recognize gender as much more than just a tool. The consequences of conflict travel beyond existing gender divisions, and we must acknowledge that every person's experiences and perspectives matter. This can lead to more effective interventions and policies that address gendered concerns and promote lasting peace and equality.

2.2. From conflict to continuity

Some patterns within academic literature emerge to explain why the gender role transformation experienced by women during active conflict regresses into the pre-conflict status quo.

The first set of patterns stems from intra-movement dynamics. The equality generated by the movements during conflict creates a false sense that women's demands have been met, leading to neglect of gender issues in the aftermath (Parpart, 2016, p. 9; Weber, 2021, p. 404). For instance, in Guatemala and Sierra Leone, women in armed movements performed new roles and experienced a sense of equality. Movement communities did not think gender inequality was a priority in the post-conflict period as they were experiencing a different reality. In contrast, those outside the movement did not experience the same equality during the conflict and remained aware of gender discrepancies (Weber, 2021, p. 404). Perceived equality hinders the creation of effective gendered reintegration initiatives.

Additionally, hierarchical structures in armed movements remain male-dominated, preserving gendered divisions of labor, reinforcing hierarchies, and legitimizing the post-conflict transition to male leadership (Parpart, 2016, p. 12; Zarkov, 2006, p. 224). Armed movements perpetuate patriarchal structures and make gender role transformation in the aftermath complex. Therefore, what is believed to be a change in gender roles may be better understood as a temporary adaptation to extraordinary circumstances.

The second pattern relates to societal dynamics. Despite their contributions, women experience backlash from their communities upon their return from conflict. Societal expectations of femininity do not fade away, and gender remains a boundary (Coulter, 2008, p. 62; Goldstein, 2001). When the conflict ends, individuals struggle to accept that women engaged in activities considered masculine. Moreover, patriarchal structures within the larger society remain untouched or even strengthened (KC & Van Der Haar, 2019, p. 448). The shifting back to traditional gender roles is often an unconscious mechanism. Societies feel that enough change, instability, and uncertainty occur during the conflict, and further change is seen as too radical and a threat to political cohesion and ideological security (Alison, 2004, p. 458; Handrahan, 2004, p. 435). The call to revert to 'normal' is the natural reaction of patriarchal structures to women's expanded space (Hilhorst, 2001, p. 24).

The final group of patterns stems from international dynamics. Notably, the failure of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs to facilitate the transformation of gender roles (Denov & Ricard-Guay, 2013; Handrahan, 2004; Hilhorst, 2001; KC & Van Der Haar, 2019; Parpart, 2016; Weber, 2021). These programs aim to protect and preserve post-conflict communities so individuals can reintegrate and achieve enduring peace, security, and development (United Nations [UN], n.d.). Nevertheless, they lack a gendered approach, neglecting or even forgetting the needs of women in the reintegration process. While men receive extensive reintegration training, women are sidelined, which perpetuates female poverty cycles as they become economically excluded (Denov & Ricard-Guay, 2013, p. 482).

These findings raise questions about the possibility of breaking away from structures that hinder gender role transformation in post-conflict societies. Notwithstanding, it is vital to highlight the cases where armed movements created a more gender-inclusive post-conflict environment.

2.3. Exceptions to the rule

Post-conflict South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Bosnia are cases where gender role transformation was possible to a significant extent. The literature emphasizes women's agency as a crucial mechanism for transformation: women coming together to exercise their power and advocate for change in the post-conflict period (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015; Handrahan, 2004; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). Additionally, research conducted in Sri Lanka shows that the country underwent a profound cultural transformation during the war, making the regression to pre-war gender roles difficult. These cultural changes were contingent on communities' acceptance of women performing new roles (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004, p. 163).

However, it is important not to overemphasize women's agency. If taken too far, it suggests that women are the masters of their fate and does not place enough stress on the role of structural factors (Wilford, 1998, p. 13). While I agree that women's agency is critical in conflict and post-conflict processes, I argue that it does not provide a sufficient explanation. If the underlying structures perpetuating gender dynamics remain untouched, gender role transformation beyond conflict is unlikely. Including women in these processes is only possible if it is accompanied by efforts to transform the social, economic, and political structures perpetuating gender roles. This ensures that women's participation is not just symbolic but also meaningful and transformative.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Conceptualization

3.1.1. Women's Participation in armed movements

Upon review of the literature, it is evident that women can engage in violence in the same way that men do (Cohn, 2013; Elsthain, 1987; Goldstein, 2001; Kampwirth, 2002). Although armed groups remain male-dominated entities, the participation of women in these groups is not uncommon (Marks, 2017, p. 438). In this paper, the term armed movement refers to armed groups that have formed outside the jurisdiction of the state.

Moreover, I consider the status of all women who associate themselves with the armed movement, regardless of their specific role. It is challenging to determine who specifically engaged in combat, as not all women admit it, and some may perform multiple roles (Tarnaala, 2016, pp. 1–2). Therefore, for simplicity's sake, I make no distinction between the different forms of women's participation in the armed movement.

3.1.2. Lasting transformation

This analysis seeks to unveil the conditions that promote gender role transformation beyond conflict. Conflict is normally not a discrete event, especially when considering women's experiences with violence. Even after 'peace' is agreed, conflict can persist (Cohn, 2013, p. 21). It is embedded in structures and legitimized by the culture to the degree that people lose sight of it (Galtung, 1996). Just as there is violence in pre-conflict situations, there will be violence in post-conflict situations. Consequently, the best is to view conflict and 'peace' as a continuum rather than something with a clear beginning and end.

Nevertheless, the nature of this research requires delimiting the aftermath of conflict. In this context, the conflict's aftermath is when armed movements cease to exist as violent entities. In most cases, it indicates that they have either made progress in achieving their goals or were stopped by external forces. Armed movements can become inactive in different ways, such as dissolving after reaching an agreement with their opposition or being demobilized due to their illegality (see, KC & Van Der Haar, 2019). Some may even transform into political parties or civil associations, as is the case of many Latin American liberation movements (see, Kampwirth, 2002). In essence, they are either dissolved entirely or institutionalized to different degrees.

3.1.3. Gender role transformation

As gender is a central organizing tool in society, it is essential to comprehend how it is utilized, how it evolves or endures, and the perspectives through which it is framed. Gender is so deeply embedded in social functioning that we often overlook its presence (Cockburn, 2004, p. 25). This is not to say that gender is the sole factor structuring power relations. It interacts with and aggregates other hierarchical factors, such as class, caste, race, age, and sexuality (Cohn, 2013, p. 2; Zarkov, 2006, p. 217). I do not suggest that understanding gender solves all issues, but a gender perspective is necessary for analyzing the moments between conflict and its aftermath. Gendering our understanding may reduce the impact of conflict on both women and men, developing strategies that consider everyone's needs and promoting the creation of lasting 'peace.'

Gender roles refer to the behaviors men and women exhibit. They are the social expectations that apply to each individual based on their assignment to a sex category (Blackstone, 2003; Calasanti, 2007; Tong, 2012). While I acknowledge that gender identity is a complex, diverse, and fluid phenomenon, the scope of the analysis will only consider the traditional gender role expectations associated with binary gender categories (male or female). Societies view men and women as fundamentally different and prescribe distinct behavioral expectations based on these differences (Calasanti, 2007). These constructions perpetuate inequalities and contribute to gendered discrimination and oppression (Calasanti, 2007; Tong, 2012).

As per the literature, gender roles within armed movements are temporarily adapted out of necessity. However, the adaptation often regresses after the conflict, and traditional gender role expectations are reactivated (see, Alison, 2004; Bop, 2001; Dietrich Ortega, 2012; Goldstein, 2001; Hale, 2001; Viterna, 2014). The transformation of gender roles in the context of this paper refers to the continuation of these adaptations into the post-conflict period. This entails permanent alterations in community expectations of women's behavior that enable them to continue performing previously forbidden roles. I prioritize analyzing gender role transformation at the community level over the national level, as a smaller-scale approach allows for a more detailed examination, and tracking progress is more feasible.

3.2.Theorizing transformation

How can the transformation of gender roles outlast the duration of violent conflict? The three patterns drawn from the literature, along with the case examples where gender role

transformation occurred, serve as a basis for developing a theory of transformation. As mentioned, while women's agency contributes to gender role transformation in the aftermath of conflict, it does not offer a sufficient explanation. In the following, I argue that certain international, societal, and intra-movement conditions create paths conducive to gender role transformation. Given these conditions, women can exercise their agency and sustain gender role transformation beyond conflict. It is essential to address gender roles at multiple levels of analysis, as changes in one level might not be enough to justify the overall transformation of gender roles. These levels are not mutually exclusive; they interact and complement each other.

3.2.1. Intra-movement dynamics

Armed movements often give women a false perception of equality by allowing them to participate in combat out of necessity rather than as part of a more significant transformation of gender roles (Alison, 2004, p. 458; Weber, 2021, p. 406). While armed movements emphasize other identities over gender, gender plays a significant role in creating and perpetuating inequality within the movements (Dietrich Ortega, 2012, p. 490). As movements become successful, women's participation and empowerment become less critical to the movement's goals, and women are marginalized (Kampwirth, 2002, p. 76). Hence, gender role transformation is only possible to the extent to which promises of gender equality are credible within the movement.

Movements prioritizing women's concerns are more likely to allow a certain degree of women's organization within their ranks. If the structure of the movement itself supports the existence of such an organization or coalition of women, the continuation of gender role transformation after the conflict is facilitated. Hence, the space for women's agency post-conflict is shaped by the opportunities and limitations the armed movement opened for women during the conflict. The causal condition for transformation is:

H1: Armed movements prioritizing women's concerns and enabling women's organization sustain gender role transformation beyond conflict.

3.2.2. Societal dynamics

Societal expectations of gender roles are part of the structures that sustain cultures. Society is uncomfortable with women deviating from their prescribed behaviors; while the deviation is

accepted in times of conflict, a return to 'normal' is needed after the conflict ends (Coulter, 2008, p. 63; Goldstein, 2001; Weber, 2021, p. 410). Local reintegration processes favor men and perpetuate gender inequalities (Parpart, 2016; Viterna & Fallon, 2008; Weber, 2021). Immediately after conflict, men take charge of the reconstruction process and determine its direction (Meintjes, 2001, p. 59). Even if all ex-combatants need retraining for employment, women are often excluded from this process (Parpart, 2016, p. 11). Thus, post-conflict societies seldom reflect women's visions.

Conflict must transform societal beliefs and practices to the extent that a return to pre-conflict conditions becomes unthinkable (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). My argument follows that the movement itself must impact the community in a way that the dynamics of the movement become legitimized beyond its ranks. The second condition for transformation is:

H2: Establishing communities that legitimize women's new roles throughout conflict sustains gender transformation beyond conflict.

3.2.3. International dynamics

The failure of DDR programs to integrate gendered concerns into the agenda is apparent (Hilhorst, 2001; KC & Van Der Haar, 2019). Despite having experienced empowerment as participants in the armed movement, the absence of a gendered perspective pushed women back to their pre-conflict positions.

These findings suggest that DDR programs uphold gendered understandings of conflicts and that their implementation mostly marginalizes women instead of signifying positive openings where women can advocate for transformation. The third condition is:

H3: In the absence of a DDR program, the transformation of gender roles beyond conflict is sustained.

4. Methods

4.1. Research design

To answer the research question, I analyze the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN[3]) as a case study. Single case studies are suitable forms of analysis because they permit the collection of diverse observations and the examination of the relationship between concrete evidence and abstract theoretical concepts (Blatter, 2012, p. 4; Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 144). I utilize a theory-testing congruence analysis (CON) approach to assess the case study, which is an analytical strategy supporting causal inference (Wauters & Beach, 2018, p. 297).

I assess how women's participation in the EZLN led to changes in gender roles within the communities where the EZLN operates. As mentioned, this entails the participation of all women who associate themselves with the armed movement. Nonetheless, due to time and resource constraints, this research captures only a partial view of the reality (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 152). The objective is to use observable empirical clues to test the proposed conditions in the context of the EZLN (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 144). It is important to note that the three hypotheses are complementary rather than competing. By considering multiple explanations, this research aims to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the factors facilitating gender role transformation in the aftermath of conflict (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 145). The CON approach establishes explanatory strength but does not rule out alternative theories (Wauters & Beach, 2018, p. 297).

Each proposed condition contains observable indicators. Firstly, H1 relates to a movement that highlights women's concerns and permits women's organization within the movement. To operationalize this hypothesis, I expect to find evidence of the EZLN promoting women's equality, encouraging women's participation, offering women a platform to voice their concerns, and giving women significant positions within the movement. The absence of such evidence suggests that women's participation in the EZLN was solely for instrumental purposes rather than a genuine commitment to gender equality.

Secondly, for H2, I examine changes at the societal level, which should extend beyond EZLN members and include community changes. Hereby, I look for the following indicators: communities accept women performing roles that entail leadership, women are allowed to

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[3] Abbreviation derived from the name in Spanish: Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional

participate in community assemblies, women are encouraged to join men in activities outside the household, and women build ties among each other. Additionally, it is relevant to note if women demonstrate feelings of empowerment, such as increased confidence, assertiveness, and willingness to challenge traditional gender roles, as this implies that they feel comfortable enough in their communities to challenge norms. If H2 is not supported, it indicates that gender role transformation was mostly limited to women within the EZLN. In this case, the end of armed conflict results in a return to traditional gender roles as the change was not embedded in local structures that could sustain it beyond conflict. Finally, H3 requires accounting for the absence of a DDR program.

Analyzing the EZLN's long-term trajectory is essential for understanding gender role transformation in the post-conflict phase. The observable indicators must consistently appear throughout the conflict and post-conflict period to support the theoretical argument. If these indicators are only present during the conflict and not in the aftermath, it invalidates the hypotheses and offers no evidence to suggest that gender role transformation occurred beyond the conflict period.

To enhance this research's validity, reliability, and replicability, I developed the hypotheses before analyzing the empirical information (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 165). By conducting deductive reasoning, I seek to establish a clear conceptual framework that can guide the analysis of the case study, ensuring rigorous and well-supported results. Although the findings of this case study are not meant to be generalized to other contexts, they can contribute to the development of gender role transformation theory.

4.2. Case selection

The EZLN emerged in 1994 as an armed guerrilla movement in Chiapas, Mexico. Initially, it had a Marxist-Leninist ideology, but it later shifted its focus to advocating for indigenous rights (Speed et al., 2006, p. 14). The movement constantly faced military repression; however, in 2005, it declared that it would stop being an armed political movement and pursue political activism instead (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional [EZLN], 2005).

The diversity of women's participation makes the EZLN a suitable case for examining the research question. During the armed years of the movement, women participated within the EZLN at different levels. They constituted one-third of the EZLN's combatants and half of its support

base (Kampwirth, 2002, pp. 2, 84; Speed et al., 2006, p. 222). The movement had four different areas of operation where women participated to varying degrees: 1) the Revolutionary Clandestine Committee-General Command (CCRI-CG), which was responsible for organizing communities and regions, 2) the regular and military structure of men and women residing in the region of the mountains, 3) the women's militias composed of women living in their communities, and 4) women who are part of the support bases but do not engage in active combat (Speed et al., 2006, pp. 222–223).

The initial selection of the EZLN was based on the absence of a DDR program, making the direct testing of H3 unnecessary. Instead, the analysis focuses on gathering empirical evidence for H1 and H2. The EZLN has a documented history of promoting gender equality, and women's roles within the organization transformed during the armed conflict (Kampwirth, 2002, 2004; Speed et al., 2006). Women within EZLN communities led restricted lives before the movement, and transformation occurred under unusual and unstable circumstances (Kampwirth, 2002, p. 95, 2004). More so, the EZLN has sustained this transformation beyond conflict and is, to this day, a movement that actively advocates for the rights of indigenous women. Hence, this case is crucial for testing the hypotheses. It challenges the prevailing finding in the literature of gender roles regressing after conflict and presents an interesting context to uncover the conditions facilitating lasting gender role transformation.

Academic research on gender role transformation after conflict varies widely regarding the analysis time frame. Ranging from studies conducted immediately in the aftermath to ethnographic interviews conducted up to twenty years after the conflict (see, Denov & Ricard-Guay, 2013; KC & Van Der Haar, 2019; Weber, 2021). To observe change, the analysis focuses on two periods: the conflict period from 1994-2005, during which the EZLN operated as an armed political movement, and the aftermath period from 2006-2016, characterized by the institutionalization of the movement. To operationalize gender role transformation in the aftermath of conflict, I consider that a 10-year gap is enough time to examine whether gender roles transformed.

4.3. Data collection

To ensure a comprehensive and unbiased qualitative analysis, I utilize a variety of data sources to support each hypothesis. On the one hand, I rely on archival documents retrieved from the EZLN official site (Enlace Zapatista). The archive contains various file types, such as laws,

declarations, discourses, interviews, letters, statements, and transcribed videos. Nonetheless, most of these documents are irrelevant to this analysis as they do not address the topic of women. Hence, I employ a convenience sample. Specifically, I collected documents from 1993 to 2016 that address women's involvement in the movement. The records include interviews with women combatants, women-related laws, statements by women members, and documents written by women. These sources provide indicators of the presence or absence of gender role transformation within the movement. The EZLN's data should be cautiously approached, as the movement may not upload information that can potentially challenge its legitimacy as egalitarian. Nonetheless, I contend that including women in their documents suggests a commitment to women's rights.

On the other hand, I draw upon existing academic research on the role of women within the EZLN. I use both books and articles consisting of ethnographic interviews and observations. These documents contain statements and empirical facts that offer insight into women's experiences within the EZLN. The sources vary widely, as some focus on the reasons behind women's mobilization, others on how women organize, and others on the personal experiences of women combatants. While this data contains different perspectives and biases, it can counterbalance the biases present in EZLN-published sources.

5. Analysis

The analysis explores how the expectations outlined in the theoretical framework contribute to the lasting transformation of gender roles in the case of the EZLN. I first introduce some background information on the movement to provide context. Then, I discuss the occurrence of gender role transformation. Lastly, I lay out the collected empirical data, assess each expectation, and discuss its implications.

5.1. Historical Background

The EZLN emerged in 1983 in the country's southeast region; however, for its first ten years of existence, it remained hidden from the public eye (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos [CNDH], n.d.; Kampwirth, 2002, p. 90). On January 1st, 1994, The EZLN launched an armed insurrection in five municipal capitals in Chiapas, coinciding with the entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement. It aimed to overthrow President Carlos Salinas de

Gortari and instigate direct democracy. Simultaneously, the movement released the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, addressing the Mexican population, asking for their support, and expressing their demands towards the government (EZLN, 1994e). The armed insurrection in Chiapas caught the government off guard. However, after some days of fighting, the military regained control (CNDH, n.d.).

Despite signing a peace agreement with the government in 1996, the demands of the EZLN were never met. For the next 11 years, the EZLN, headed by the Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee-General Command (CCRI-CG), remained an armed organization that constantly opposed the government's subordination and demanded justice for their indigenous communities. Nonetheless, in 2005, the EZLN declared through the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle that it would cease to be a military organization and instead follow an institutional path (EZLN, 2005). While there were still many unresolved issues, this declaration significantly changed the EZLN's approach. Since then, the EZLN has transformed into a political movement with an extensive base of public support both nationally and internationally, and it continues to fight for minority rights.

5.2. Lasting gender role transformation within the EZLN

To imply that women started constructing their identities as indigenous people and women with the rise of the EZLN is to undermine women's awareness and skills. However, women's participation in the EZLN permitted a radical change in their roles (Padierna, 2013, p. 134). These gender role changes have been sustained and reinforced throughout the aftermath of the conflict thanks to the various dynamics that enabled them during the conflict.

The EZLN's transition from conflict to peace significantly differed from the other armed movements. The EZLN emerged in a more contemporary political and social context compared to other armed movements. thus, accounting for other pressures that led the EZLN to uphold its commitment to gender equality is essential: a) the movement is part of a Mexican society that continues to progress on women's rights, b) international pressures and support required the movement to uphold an egalitarian commitment, and c) the Mexican government was more receptive of the movement than other governments had been (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 115). Moreover, no DDR program demobilized the movement and forced its participants to reintegrate into their prior roles. The EZLN decided to overtake the transition as the members realized their

political goals had to change if they wanted to achieve gains and increase their support base (EZLN, 2005). From my perspective, making this decision permitted the movement to take control of its transformation, push its agenda, and not rely on external actors to move forward.

The EZLN emphasizes its commitment to women's equality and participation in its yearly statements. Their commitment has evolved, with women being given different platforms to organize and expand their influence beyond the movement. For instance, in a meeting by Zapatista women, they discussed their progress from 1994 to the present and agreed that significant changes occurred. They now participate in town assemblies, vote for their authorities, form women's collectives, and pursue education and employment opportunities (EZLN, 2009). Similarly, in a series of speeches, Zapatista women shared that the organization gives them freedom and rights that they continue to fight for and defend (EZLN, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). This offers evidential support for gender transformation beyond conflict.

The EZLN recognizes that there is still a long way to go regarding women's rights. In a post-conflict speech, Sub-comandante Marcos recognized the societal expectations and limitations placed on women, claiming that: "a woman has to ask permission to be a woman, and permission is only granted if it fits the assembly instructions" (EZLN, 2006). This indicates a recognition of the constraints that traditional gender roles place on women's behavior and exclude them from performing certain activities. Moreover, women acknowledge the obstacles they continue to encounter, with many towns still granting fewer jobs to women and limiting their participation (EZLN, 2009). Although the transformation of gender roles is a bumpy road, progress continues to be made. Before the conflict, many of these women had limited opportunities. The expansion of opportunities and the acceptance that women face many constraints indicates transformation.

So far, there is evidence of gender role transformation. However, assessing the conditions that facilitated this transformation is an important step. In the following, I evaluate the congruence of my theoretical expectations against the empirical data I gathered on the EZLN.

5.3. The implications of EZLN dynamics on gender role transformation

The first condition follows that armed movements that prioritize women's concerns and allow women to organize will sustain gender role transformation beyond conflict.

From the beginning of the uprising, women played a prominent role in the EZLN (Velasco Yáñez, 2017, p. 103). Overall, indigenous people were marginalized from the benefits of

development. However, these effects were felt even harder by women within these communities, as they experienced a double marginalization: one fueled by governmental injustices and another entrenched in a culture that favors men above all (Speed et al., 2006, p. 75). Women wanted to change their situation, and the EZLN opened a space for them to articulate their demands (Speed et al., 2006, p. 82).

The inclusion of women into the EZLN was made apparent by the publication of the Women's Revolutionary Law (EZLN, 1993). This law was part of a series of documents the movement made public on the date of its emergence. It asserted that women could integrate into the EZLN at all levels, grants them the right to participate in combat, and supports them in their fight for economic and political equality. Even more groundbreaking, the law addressed the private sphere, defending women's rights to decide over their bodies, choose their partners, and protect them from violence. Even if the extent to which this law has been respected is debated, it indicates the movement's intention of transforming traditional gender norms. The creation of this law signified a step forward in gender equality and carried within it the recognition that women face unique issues separate from those of men. By including these concerns in the EZLN's core values from the start, the movement opened spaces for women to participate and feel accepted. Not only could they fight, but their capacity to decide was also being recognized. The EZLN was taking a stance against the government and how it marginalizes women and against the indigenous communities where women's issues in the private sphere had been ignored.

Similarly, when the EZLN sent its demands to the Mexican government, women were allowed to include a clause stating their demands. Women's demands mainly focused on the provision of childcare centers, health clinics, safe transport to their workplaces, and dining halls for their families (EZLN, 1994a). While these demands may seem to perpetuate traditional gender roles, it is vital to put into perspective that women had not previously been allowed to express their demands in such a way (Velasco Yáñez, 2017, pp. 70–72). I consider this a significant departure from the traditional exclusion of women in decision-making processes where women's needs and desires had long been overlooked.

Moreover, the movement allowed women to voice their opinions and organize. For instance, on Mach 8[th,] 1994, during Women's Day, Zapatista women delivered speeches to their communities and the nation, encouraging other women to join their struggle (EZLN, 1994b, 1994c, 1994d). They said that contrary to the rest of the country, the EZLN practiced democracy and

justice, enabling women to participate in the same activities as men. As opposed to many women outside the EZLN's reach, indigenous women within the movement were taught how to read, speak Spanish, and take upon new responsibilities. Consequently, this opened many doors for them, as they were no longer secluded in their communities and were given the tools to expand their agency into the outside world (Speed et al., 2006, p. 147). Ultimately, women must exercise agency. However, the movement's prioritization of women's demands facilitated their ability to do so.

Parallel to this, women were positioned in a place where they came together with men. The Zapatistas realized that to have an impact, women and men needed to fight together (Velasco Yáñez, 2017, p. 146). In 1995, Commandant Ramona, one of the women members of the CCRI-CG, became the first indigenous woman to address the Mexican Parliament. She was sent on behalf of the EZLN, and although she was not there to push a women's agenda, her presence as a representative over that of men demonstrated how women were given equal importance (EZLN, 1995). Moreover, in a series of letters and speeches, Sub-comandante Marcos, the de-facto leader and spokesman of the EZLN, acknowledged that women face more difficulties than men, stating, "They are soldiers, but they are women as well" (EZLN, 2000). He also expressed admiration for those women who, despite their position, overcame fear and participated in the EZLN (EZLN, 2000). The EZLN's approach of placing women on equal footing with men while recognizing their unique challenges serves as additional evidence of the movement's prioritization of women. This contrasts with a traditional view that would ignore or deny women's subordination to advance the movement's goals (see, Dietrich Ortega, 2012).

Nonetheless, there were tensions around women's demands within Zapatismo, as not every member of the EZLN agreed with the newfound position of women, or in many cases, the older women were uncomfortable with this transformation of circumstances (Speed et al., 2006, pp. 86, 92). Women within the EZLN admitted that not all indigenous cultures within the EZLN prioritized women, and they realized some men had trouble understanding women's needs, as they were uncomfortable with women working outside the household (EZLN, 2001a). Even though the fight was shared between women and men, women recognized that some aspects belonged only to them because, as much as men could understand, their experiences would never be the same (Velasco Yáñez, 2017, p. 147). It is unrealistic to expect a complete change in the mindset of every individual, particularly in a movement that emerged from a culture deeply rooted in tradition. Even so, the evidence pinpoints that the EZLN consistently made efforts to accommodate women's

demands and encouraged their organization, which sustained gender role transformation beyond conflict.

5.4. The implications of community dynamics on gender role transformation

The second condition of this analysis dictates that the establishment of communities that legitimize women's new roles throughout conflict sustains gender transformation post-conflict.

Before the rise of the EZLN, community dynamics were changing due to structural factors. On the one hand, the Mexican government encouraged the colonization of the Lacandon Jungle in response to land reforms. Many indigenous communities from different backgrounds had to leave their villages and settle in the jungle. Consequently, people came together, and an indigenous sentiment among them was born. Moreover, the move to the jungle cut some ties that constrained women's autonomy, as they were no longer linguistically isolated (Kampwirth, 2002, pp. 90–92). On the other hand, some people stayed in the highlands. However, these communities were economically unstable, which led men to seek new occupations that required them to leave their communities for long periods. This created an opportunity for women to learn new skills and adopt new responsibilities in the absence of men (Kampwirth, 2002, p. 92).

With the emergence of the EZLN, women recognized the value of their contributions and had the opportunity to continue increasing their acquired independence within the community. In an interview, two high-ranking Zapatista women stated that "without the support of the community, there would be no army" (EZLN, 1994b). It was primarily women who remained in the communities and kept them functioning. If they had not offered this type of support, the EZLN would not have been able to reach its goals; women's new roles needed to be legitimized. In some accounts, Zapatista women state they learned they could participate or work when the EZLN emerged (EZLN, 2015c, 2015b). Some women claim their fear and shame decreased as they realized that the revolution needed them as much as it needed men (EZLN, 2015c). Women gained increased access to posts of social responsibility in their communities, such as becoming members of cooperatives, and health promoters, creating saving cooperatives, and in many cases, through direct negotiation with the authorities (Speed et al., 2006, p. 78). The participation of women in various roles within the community was essential for the functioning of the EZLN.

Renegotiations of gender roles occurred at the community level constantly. Women acquired new responsibilities as men left their communities to fight with the Zapatistas. For

instance, they had to remain single for longer periods, and getting married at young age ceased to be a requirement. The families had to accept these new circumstances, as they still needed to survive (Speed et al., 2006, p. 88; Velasco Yáñez, 2017, pp. 160–162). Similarly, in some communities, men increasingly helped women with tasks considered exclusively women's domain, such as cooking, household chores, and child care (Speed et al., 2006, p. 230). Gradually, the communities embraced an idea of organizing that involved both men and women. They needed to accept the transformation of gender roles, specifically the division of political and economic labor, as they realized that if women did not contribute, there was no way of moving forward (Speed et al., 2006, p. 90; Velasco Yáñez, 2017, p. 151). Adapting to the absence of men and accepting women's new roles ultimately transformed the functioning of the community.

Another change that materialized was the decrease in domestic violence within indigenous communities. Often, the husbands of many of the indigenous women would get jealous of them participating in activities outside the households and would react violently toward them (Speed et al., 2006, p. 90; Velasco Yáñez, 2017, pp. 125–126, 148). However, the Zapatista army mitigated this component by prohibiting the consumption of alcohol. When men returned to their communities, they could not drink, and violent incidents diminished. I do not suggest that the EZLN fully deconstructed the social and cultural order that had existed for hundreds of years. Still, the modifications it introduced did signify an improvement compared to previous conditions.

Women's experiences transformed with the arrival of the EZLN, as they began to engage with different scales of power and representation. The newfound visibility of women's concerns within the movement empowered them to articulate gendered demands and shifted how they perceived themselves. They formed their own women's organizations and transformed the local power scale, normalizing these changes among some communities (Speed et al., 2006, pp. 115–120). In an interview, Norma, a member of the EZLN, explains that "as the governance structures of communities [changed] to accommodate the presence of the EZLN, the local political culture began to change" (Speed et al., 2006, p. 164). The EZLN offered communities a scenario where they could transform their living conditions.

Nonetheless, women and men within the EZLN still recognized that change was not universal. Some men found it difficult to accept women's new roles, and women were seldom chosen to hold critical political posts within their communities, even if it was an option (EZLN, 2001b, 2004). Much like within the EZLN, not all individuals in these communities were prepared

to accept such significant changes to traditional gender roles. Despite this, the evidence suggests that the community made efforts to legitimize women's roles and acknowledge their contributions.

6. Results

All in all, the findings indicate a continuing transformation of gender roles within the EZLN. The extent of the transformation varies but is nonetheless there. The Zapatista movement achieved something previous armed groups had failed to do: it carried forward the gender dynamics it constructed during conflict into the post-conflict period.

The lasting transformation of gender roles was facilitated by the combination of conditions at the international, community, and intra-movement levels. Firstly, the EZLN's transition to a state of 'peace' differed vastly from other armed movements. In a way, peace was a continuation of their fight. It did not mean the dissolution of the movement or an end of the conflict; it signaled more of a change of strategy, which enabled them to keep exerting an influence in Mexican society. Because they rely on national and international support, dropping their commitment to an egalitarian agenda would end their influence and credibility.

Secondly, communities underwent a profound cultural transformation as the movement gained prominence. The new situation required adaptations, as only a few alternatives were available. Women's expanded participation within the communities often resulted from the dynamics the movement had set for itself. For the movement to enact its goals, gender role changes had to be legitimate in the communities. The transformation was such that a return to the status quo was unlikely.

Finally, the EZLN has prioritized and encouraged women since its emergence. The inclusion of women's demands signals a recognition of women's interests and priorities. Women were recognized for their value to the cause and as individuals with their own battle to fight. Hence, the evidence points to an inclusive movement that consistently prioritizes women's demands and includes women at all levels of participation.

7. Conclusion

This study discusses the structural conditions in which women's participation in armed movements leads to lasting gender role transformation. Accordingly, I suggest three levels of analysis, each with one condition that contributes to transformation: intra-movement, community, and international levels. I evaluate these propositions in the case of the EZLN. The empirical

evidence supports the expectations, indicating that structural factors at each level facilitated gender role transformation beyond conflict. Significant conditions were the EZLN's prioritization of women's concerns and encouragement of women's organization, community transformations during the conflict, and the nature of the movement's post-conflict transition. These conditions provided spaces for women to enact their agency and advocate for their cause.

The findings stand in contrast with most of the literature on post-conflict gender roles, as the typical finding is that gender role changes that occur during conflict are reversed in the aftermath. This does not undermine previous research on the topic, as regression has been confirmed for most of the cases. However, the potential for lasting transformation presents a favorable glance. A genuine commitment to equality is possible without compromising the movement's purpose.

Because of its nature, this research presents limitations. One limitation relates to the availability of data regarding women within the EZLN. While much on the relationship between women and the EZLN during the conflict period is available, post-conflict data is more challenging to come across. Additionally, I relied on data that does not necessarily represent all women affected by the Zapatista uprising. Even if many communities did change their ways, and women demonstrated feelings of empowerment, the changes are not experienced to the same extent by all women. Many are still marginalized privately and publicly. Future research should employ an inside case comparison approach. Conducting interviews with women from diverse communities would allow for an evaluation of the places where transformation occurred and the communities where it did not, shedding light on the factors that influenced the outcome.

Finally, this analysis focused only on gendered dynamics connected to the EZLN; however, as the EZLN was developing, so were other women's organizations and initiatives within Mexico. The rise of the EZLN should not be seen as the direct cause of indigenous women's empowerment; women have long had their fight and will long continue to have one, even in the absence of such a movement. Further research on the interconnection between these women's organizations and the EZLN could provide insights into how they influenced each other, whether women had overlapping membership, and whether their goals were competing or complementary. Ultimately, developing theories on gender role transformation is essential to shedding light on the conditions that enable change despite many existing challenges.

8.   Bibliography

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