

University of Twente, Enschede
Faculty of Behavioral, Management, and Social Sciences
Public Governance across Borders
Dr. Igor Tempels Moreno Pessoa & Dr. Matthias Freise

The Zapatista Movement and the Development of Feminist Utopianism

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Cleo Salome Friedrich

Abstract

This thesis discusses the conceptualization of feminist utopianism as a political theory and how its characteristics are applied within the autonomous Zapatista municipalities in Mexico. Today's societal and political landscape is still marked by patriarchal traits, characterized by male domination and female oppression, impacting not only on the safety and quality of life of many women, but also political and administrative agenda-setting and lower female political participation. But are there ways to break this system and replace it with a new one which can enforce equity? In Mexico, a group of rebels dissociated from the national government and formed autonomous municipalities, in which they have managed to construct new forms of governing, aiming at autonomy and freedom for all, as well as at creating equality between men and women.

By conducting a conceptual content analysis using Zapatista policy documents, statements, and speeches, the research question “*How do the autonomous Zapatista municipalities in Mexico embody feminist utopianism as a political theory?*” was answered. The findings demonstrated a clear overlap between the Zapatista agenda and feminist ideals, as well as utopian thought. While still facing challenges in implementation, the Zapatistas are following a path of feminist utopianism in their fight for autonomy.

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Introduction

Almost thirty years ago, on January 1 1994, a group of indigenous Mexican rebels stormed multiple cities within the Mexican state of Chiapas as a reaction to the entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Ross, 1995). This group called themselves “Ejército Zapatista de Liberación” (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) also known by the acronym EZLN, and they were protesting for their belief of the Mexican government no longer acting in favor of the common citizen. The essence of the EZLN was to strengthen indigenous autonomy and create a structure in which the natural resources of Chiapas would benefit those living and working within that region (Ross 1995). In another operation, the Zapatistas then announced their dissociation from the national government and their refusal of recognizing local authorities by creating 38 autonomous municipalities and proclaiming their autonomy in the “Third Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle” in 1995 (Stahler-Sholk, 2007). What set the Zapatistas apart from other groups advocating autonomy was their inclusion of women’s rights onto their agenda early on. Even before their uprising in Chiapas, in 1993 the “Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena” (Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee) by the EZLN published the “Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres” (Women’s Revolutionary Law), which aimed at creating not only an egalitarian culture between women and men but granted equal rights and obligations. Among others, it included rights to political and societal participation, equal pay, and education, as well as complete reproductive rights and the security to live without fear of sexual and domestic violence (EZLN, 2013). The Zapatistas’ aim to create an equitable society was also apparent in the distribution of roles within various Zapatista structures. At the time of the uprising, a third of Zapatista combatants were women, some of them in commanding positions, and more than half of the Zapatista support bases in Chiapas were constituted by women (Speed et al., 2013). Zapatista women thereby acted as transformative political subjects, working on the “collective struggle for obtaining rights such as to land, to participate politically, and to organize themselves in the armed struggle” (Bellamy, 2021, p. 86) thus disrupting “the racist, classist, and patriarchal nation-state” (Bellamy, 2021, p. 87).

The latest UN WOMEN statistics have shown that almost one in three women have been subject to gender violence at least once in their life (UN WOMEN, n.d.). The amount of people experiencing discrimination, violence, and oppression based on reasons such as gender, stress the importance of developing new systems, able to counteract and reduce those injustices. An

opportunity to start developing new alternatives of how equity and justice can be translated into every-day life could be found within feminist utopian thought. It could help with developing more innovative ways of thinking that go more in-depth than “just” policymaking but rather demand a general situational improvement affecting policy, polity, and politics. The Zapatista movement has created a stir, not only in Chiapas, but worldwide, by demonstrating that creating new structures is not only possible but can also be fruitful. Scientific research on feminist utopianism and its possibilities and challenges in implementation must be conducted, not only to close the knowledge gap surrounding its conceptualization but also to act as a catalyst for societies to start taking more innovative and alternative paths against injustice and discrimination.

This research aims at making a connection between the Zapatista structure and feminist utopianism, a concept currently still lacking an extensive scientific analysis and conceptualization. In a world where everyday life is disrupted by discrimination, xenophobia, and (gender) violence, lethargy can rule the public discourse, making utopian imagination more important than ever (Levitas, 2000). I will analyze what specific implications feminist utopianism holds, how it differs from the utopian ideals known from books and movies, and whether the ideals of feminist utopianism can be found within the structures of the Zapatista municipalities. While there has been quite some research on how the EZLN embraces feminist ideals, this thesis targets two knowledge gaps: the conceptualization of feminist utopianism, as well as the embodiment of its key concepts by the Zapatistas. This research will strive towards showing the importance of encouraging the construction of alternative solutions when combatting societal struggles and trying to create equitable and just societies.

Since this research aims at connecting feminist utopianism with the Zapatista structure, the following research question shall be attempted to be answered in the following sections:

How do the autonomous Zapatista municipalities in Mexico embody feminist utopianism as a political theory?

To further clarify the research objective, the following sub questions have been developed:

- 1. How can utopia be defined from a viewpoint of political science?*
- 2. How does feminist utopianism differ from other conceptualizations of utopia?*
- 3. How does the Zapatista struggle for autonomy overlap with feminist ideals?*

The proposed research question and sub questions do not view reality as objective, but rather as part of social contexts. Since the topic must be studied within its societal as well as historical context, reality is being “interpreted” to analyze data. The research question can therefore be classified as being of interpretive nature, best analyzed by using a qualitative content-based approach. The questions were answered using the following structure: In the theory section, the concepts of feminism and utopianism were researched and summarized, paying close attention to the theoretical arguments and findings from previous studies and scholars. This was used to then draw conclusions as to what feminist utopianism entails and how scholars have defined its differences to utopianism in general. The research on feminism and utopianism were utilized to create a conceptualization of feminist utopianism from a viewpoint of political science. The subsequent section will then present the applied methodology, give information about the data sources used and the method of data collection and data analysis. After defining the applied methodology, the analysis part outlines the process of data collection and its findings, which were then interpreted and put into context in the conclusion and discussion.

Theory

To adequately answer the research question, existing models and theories that are relevant to the topic must be analyzed and put into context. This theoretical section will therefore establish which theories are suitable to lay the groundwork for this research. Although feminist utopianism has been subject to a few scientific articles and works in general in the past, there is no clear conceptualization describing its characteristics and possible modes of application, especially from a direct political perspective. Therefore, to break the concept up, feminist theory and utopianism will be defined precisely to then find a way of merging their implications with what has already been written about feminist utopianism. Feminism and utopianism are both quite broad terms which do not allow a direct translation towards analytical work. Therefore, this part attempts to narrow both concepts down, as well as combine them to introduce a framework of feminist utopianism. In the next sections existing models and concepts will be discussed in terms of how previous literature has defined each term as well as its relevance for this specific research.

Feminism

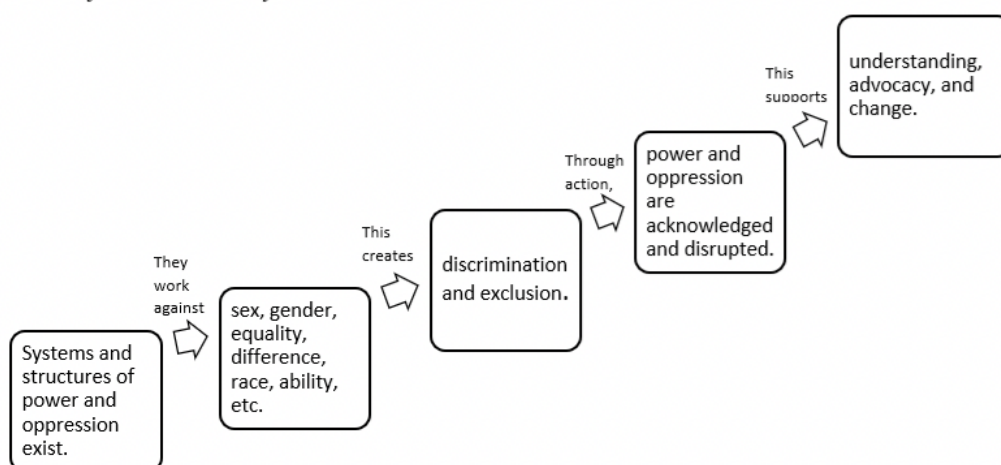
As stated before, a specific conceptualization of Feminism is needed to create the groundwork for the development of Feminist Utopianism as a political theory. While feminism in today's discourse is used as a broad identifying term, connotated with and by individuals demanding equal treatment of men and women, feminist theory is also of importance from a viewpoint of political theory. Before getting into what Feminism as a political concept implies, the construct of gender within the scope of this thesis must be defined. Since most theoretical work does not yet write about the construct of gender beyond the binary structure (female/male), this section of defining a political framework of feminism will also focus on gender from that binary perspective. Recognizing however, that feminism goes beyond the inequality of women and men and instead acknowledges that gender is nonbinary, and that the patriarchal structure affects people of all genders. The term patriarchy will be used for describing a social system built on male domination (Millett, 2016, p.25).

Similar to other theories of large complexity, feminism is characterized differently, depending on the angle from which it is defined. The most common approaches to conceptualizing feminism are liberal feminism and radical feminism (McAfee and Howard, 2022). Liberal feminism views women's autonomy as the key point of achieving freedom and equality since it emphasizes the importance of women being able to take part in steering policymaking

(Kittay, 1999). Critiquing liberal feminism today goes hand in hand with critiquing neoliberalism in general, by questioning the sustainability of democratic values within free-market ideals and whether feminist liberalism can break the male dominated private spaces (Butler, 2015). Radical feminist theories build upon those critiques, and do not view the individual freedom as crucial, but instead highlight the importance of acknowledging the patriarchal structure as a whole and advocating for change (McAfee and Howard, 2022). The “goal” of radical feminists is therefore to create new spaces where policy, polity and politics are restructured to break the cycle of male domination and female subordination.

In political theory, Feminism is generally seen as an engaged theory under the umbrella term of critical theory, therefore aiming at challenging and changing society (Bryson, 2003). As a political theory, it examines oppression and subordination of women as central in political analysis and further acknowledges that the goal would be a completely new social structure instead of equality within an unequal society (Bryson, 2003, p.3). Change is a fundamental characteristic of feminism, since it does not only try to understand the reasons for the ways in which society is structured but also how it ought to be and how to go about achieving those goals. Feminist Political Philosophy therefore uncovers “ways in which women and their current and historical concerns are poorly depicted, represented, and addressed” (McAfee and Howard, 2022) and gives justifications for how political institutions and practices should be restructured and redeveloped to not only lead to individual betterment but collective improvement of public life. Based on theoretical classifications of feminism, Jo Ann Arinder (2020) created the following model to showcase the core concept of feminism as a political and procedural theory:

Figure 1
Model of Feminist Theory



The core concepts of feminism are based on sex, gender, race, discrimination, equality, difference, and choice. Change and advocacy can only occur if power structures and systems of oppression are challenged and disrupted (Egbert and Sanden, 2019). This framework will be applied to the structure created by the EZLN within the autonomous Zapatista municipalities. The focus will lay on what mechanisms the Zapatista created to guarantee that power and oppression are disrupted to create advocacy and change.

Zapatismo and Women's Rights

This thesis aims at connecting feminist utopianism and the uprising of new structures within Zapatista communities. The theoretical insights given regarding feminism are to be seen from a critical perspective when applying them to the Zapatismo. This is because Zapatista women do not consider themselves as feminists, which will further be elaborated on within this section. This part will therefore showcase the EZLN's agenda regarding women's rights, and the difficulty in classifying its contents.

While most feminist agendas focus on sexual and reproductive rights, land rights can be considered at the roots of the Zapatista uprising (Bellamy, 2021). Owning land was considered as exclusive to men, putting women in a subordinate position, depriving them of power in decision-making (RECMURIC, 2015). This struggle was not exclusive to women, but to indigenous communities in general, since the land they were working on was still being controlled by rich landowners with colonial pasts. In order to break up that system, the Zapatistas organized their uprising, because "without land there is no autonomy, and without weapons there is no land" (Bellamy, 2021, p.94). When considering those ownership rights, it is important to note that the patriarchal system in Mexico can be classified as a "patriarchal junction", combining original ancestral Mexican patriarchy with the colonialist Christian Western patriarchy (Gargallo, 2012, p.22). Breaking up the patriarchy therefore implies breaking up colonialist remnants, making the Zapatista's fight applicable against all kinds of injustices, marginalization, poverty, and exploitation (Park, 2007). The struggle of Zapatista women thereby lies not only within the realms of gender, but also within being indigenous and poor, making them "transformative political subjects that disrupt the racist, classist, and patriarchal nation-state" (Bellamy, 2021, p.87).

The agenda of the EZLN calls for definitive transformation (Bellamy, 2021), which includes indigenous autonomy but also autonomy of women. The Women's Revolutionary Law (1993) incorporated women in the Zapatista ranks, thereby expanding their possibilities to shape those

discussions of transformation, making them “equally responsible members of their community” (Park, 2007).

Zapatista Women’s Revolutionary Law (1993), published in The Mexican Awakener (January 1st, 1994) quoted from schoolsforchiapas.org

- 1) 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.
- 2) Women have the right to work and receive a just salary.
- 3) Women have the right to decide the number of children they have and care for.
- 4) Women have the right to participate in the matters of the community and have charge if they are free and democratically elected.
- 5) Women and their children have the right to Primary Attention in their health and nutrition.
- 6) Women have the right to education.
- 7) Women have the right to choose their partner and are not obliged to enter into marriage.
- 8) Women have the right to be free of violence from both relatives and strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished.
- 9) Women will be able to occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.
- 10) Women will have all the rights and obligations which the revolutionary laws and regulations give.

After the Mexican Revolution, in which women’s roles were defined through feminized tasks of submissive character and being transforming agents was a role exclusively taken on by men (Hernández, 2019), women were part of the Zapatista uprising from the beginning as established in the Women’s Revolutionary Law. The movement shows that not only was it built on female efforts early on, but that women also took on leading and transforming roles in comparison to the feminized tasks during the Mexican Revolution.

The EZLN agenda, and especially the Revolutionary Women’s Law, vehemently tries to leave no room for androcentrism or machismo (Marcos, 2011), and while their contents give reason to classify the Zapatista as feminists, the EZLN avoids and rejects being defined and classified

through this term. According to Bellamy, naming the Zapatistas feminist imposes a hegemonic rhetoric, as well as a western worldview on their actions and policies (2021). A western view on gender equality and even intersectional feminism fails to include the individual struggle indigenous women in Mexico must encounter (Park, 2007). For the sake of this thesis, the framework of feminist utopianism will be based on what Zapatista women find important in the context of gender equality and autonomy and will be extended with some of the insights regarding western feminism. Since this paper's research question steers towards analyzing how the ideals of feminist utopianism are embodied by the EZLN municipalities, this allows for a critical inspection of western feminism, as well as its discrepancies and possible overlaps with the Zapatismo. The goal is not to declare whether the Zapatistas could be classified as feminists, but rather to research how their thoughts and actions might pose an opportunity for egalitarian utopian thinking on one hand, and how the EZLN challenges western feminist ideals on the other hand. While the term "feminism/feminist" will be used within this thesis, the Zapatistas will not be called feminists in this scope, but rather classified as advocates against injustice and oppression within the realms of gender, class, and race.

Utopianism

Utopian thinking can be seen as a "universal human phenomenon" (Sargent, 1994, p.3) as the possibility to reflect on reality and contemporary problems as well as simultaneously creating ideals and ways of improving those shortcomings. Portrayals of ideal societies can be found in early writings such as biblical illustrations of *The Garden of Eden* or in Classical philosophy such as Plato's *Republic* (Fernando et. al., 2018). Utopia has since then mostly been created as a subject of novels, movies, and the arts in general, in which utopianism is rather a thought of reaching perfection within an individual's personal ideology (Maahs, 2019). This thought comes with the understanding of utopia as a "wishfully constructed place" (Gray, 2008), unrealistic in nature, therefore also known as "transcendent utopia" (Davis, 2021). Utopia does, however, also hold an importance in political thought. Within political theory, utopia can be defined as a "concrete, systemic account of the social conditions for the fulfillment of human happiness" (Levitas, 2007, p.295), and must shift from the ideologized fantasies of novels to a scope, possible to reach. Davis describes this view on utopianism as "grounded utopia", which encourages "greater imaginative awareness of neglected or suppressed possibilities for qualitatively better forms of living latent in the present" (Davis, 2021, p.571). McManus adds to that by arguing that "utopia should always be comprised of at least four elements: those of

alterity and critique, and those of prefiguration and transformation” (McManus, 2003, p.3). Grounded utopian thought can therefore stimulate creative development towards making politics more innovative and oriented towards public interest (Maahs, 2019, p.283). As already stated, however, utopia is not a definitive condition, but rather a “productive impossibility” (McManus, 2003, p.16), process- and dialogue- oriented by nature, which is to be approached in a continuous and never-ending development.

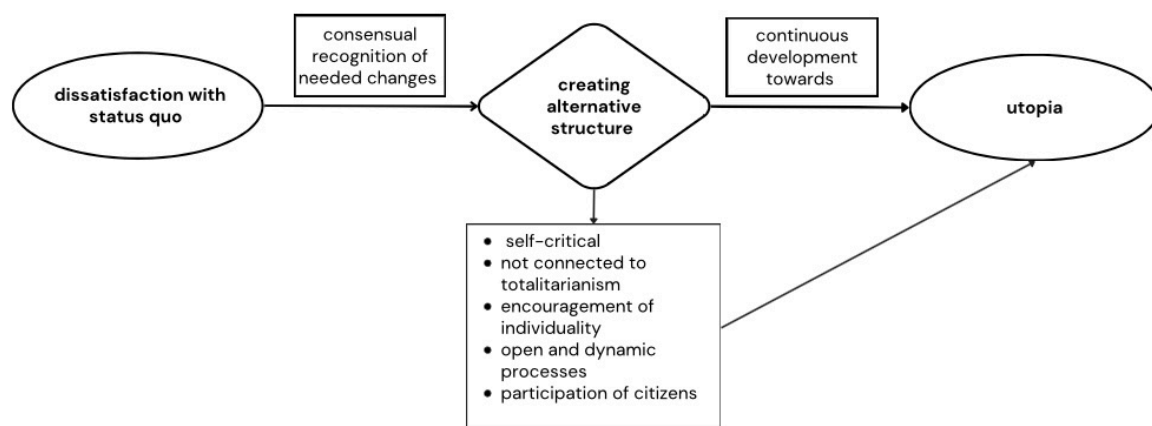
Not only political processes and routines might be influenced by utopian thought, but social movements in general. On a psychological level, collective dissatisfaction with the status quo might result in strengthening collective rather than individual self-regulation, thereby animating social change (Fernando et. al., 2018). Scholars such as Goodwin and Taylor (1982) argue that movements such as the French or the American revolution could be traced back to the purpose of trying to establish utopian visions of liberty and equality of the enlightenment, and that generally most ideas that eventually lead to social change were evident in utopian writings before (Goodwin & Taylor, 1982). This phenomenon is not only evident on large scale examples but can also be observed on smaller scale movements such as intentional communities, where a group of people choose to live together based on a shared ideology or purpose (Sargent, 1994). Ruth Levitas (1990) identified three key functions of Utopia in social movements: *change*, *criticism*, and *compensation*. According to Levitas, utopian ideals motivate people to realize what changes would be necessary to reach improvement, or even ideal living standards, thereby animating activism, and advocating for *change*. The function of *criticism* is found within the process of realizing the shortcomings of the status quo and providing a direct comparison of contemporary problems with possible alternatives, leading to a clearer evaluation of current states. *Compensation* describes the opposite phenomenon. Utopian thought might lead to escapism, where the ideal society functions only as a desired fantasy, resulting in escapism as an avoidance technique or even coping mechanism, thereby possibly impeding social change (Levitas 1990).

To really understand utopianism, it might be helpful to also define the term of dystopia as a clear distinction between the two concepts. As displayed in the previous sections, utopia can be defined from different angles, such as political utopias, social change, or the realization of ideals within smaller communities. In contrast to that, dystopia is closely connected to political theory, by most scholars viewing dystopia as the failed attempt of utopia leading to totalitarianism of the 20th century (Claeys, 2017). From this perspective, dystopia is equated with totalitarianism in the sense of extreme coercion, inequality, and forceful attempts of

instating a system disadvantaging minorities, for example through conformist structures that repress all forms of individuality (Claeys, 2017).

When trying to contextualize the characteristics identified in the past sections, Ina-Maria Maahs' (2019) research on political utopianism allows a construction of a framework of contemporary political Utopias. She describes the beginning of creating utopia as within collectively criticizing the status quo and strive not towards individual realization of happiness, but rather an overall situational improvement (Maahs, 2019; Friedman, 1977). This collective creation of utopia does not provide a definitive solution but acts as a model for continuous development on the basis of disruption. It builds mostly on the level of polity, by not only cumulating ideas of betterment through policy and politics, but simultaneously creating new societal constructs and spaces (Maahs, 2019).

Figure 2
Model of Utopianism



Due to the complexity of utopianism, this conceptualization is simplified so it can be construed for different systems or structures. It focuses on Levitas' (1990) functions on criticism and change through collective dissatisfaction and the creation of alternative spaces which are anti-totalitarianist in nature and build upon the participation of citizens (Maahs, 2019).

Feminist Utopianism

Although both feminism and utopianism have been greatly reviewed by scientific authors for the past decades, feminist utopianism as a political theory has not been clearly defined. In her book "Contemporary Feminist Utopianism", Lucy Sargisson (2002) confirms the importance of constructions, fluid and dynamic in character, especially in feminist utopianism. She claims that the process of exact conceptualization of how utopia must function creates confinement

and thereby implicates exclusion which fundamentally goes against feminist theories (Sargisson, 2002). This is why utopianism is crucial to feminist imagination. The limited political, economic, and social capital of women within the patriarchy results in feminists having to look into the future and be creative in their expressions by breaking up existing systems (Johns, 2010). Sargisson also strengthens the argument that feminist utopianism builds on deconstruction, since its ideals cannot be realized in the patriarchal conceptualization. The resulting reconceptualization of society must therefore be characterized by interdependence instead of hierarchy (Sargisson, 2002). According to Johns, feminist utopianism must be defined as a process-oriented concept, with five key features: (1) education as the focus and center of development, (2) adaptable human nature with social focus, (3) shared power leading to gradualist change, (4) a dynamic view of the surrounding, and (5) pragmatism (Johns, 2010). This will set the groundwork for continuous change directly answering to the people’s needs while considering that those needs might change, depending on how circumstances may develop. What really differentiates feminist utopianism from the grounded utopianism explained in the section before, is that feminist utopianism relies on a common ground (Sargisson, 2002). While utopianism in general can have completely different ideals as to how the status quo is criticized, and what the alternative society should look like, feminist utopianism always builds on the deconstruction of the patriarchal system.

Figure 3
Model of Feminist Utopianism

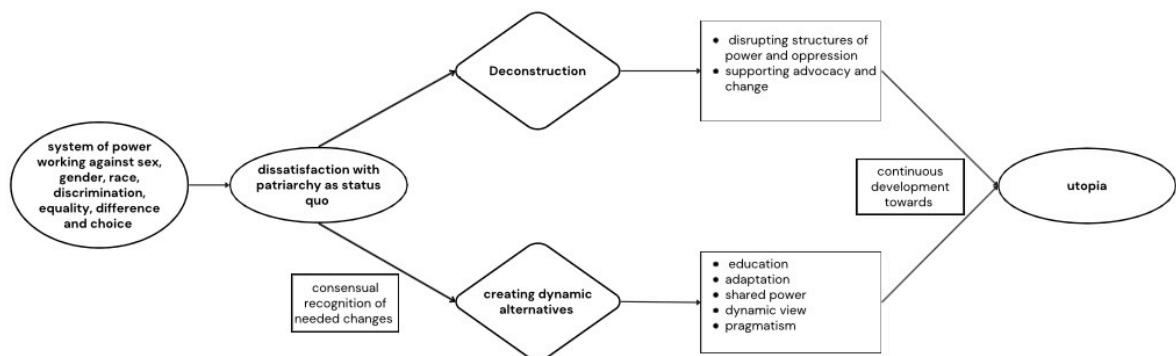


Figure 3 represents a merged version of figure 1 and figure 2, illustrated in the preceding sections. It includes the utopian ideal of creating alternative structures through processes dynamic in nature but refers to the discontent with the status quo as the patriarchal structure specifically. The main effort is therefore found within deconstructing the systems of domination and subordination through advocating alternatives through education, adaptation, and shared power.

Theoretical Expectations and Insights

The introduced theories lay the groundwork of this thesis. Since the research question aims at answering how the Zapatista structure embodies feminist utopianism, the illustrated concepts create a base of background understanding and information that the analysis can build up on. What became evident while clarifying the characteristics of especially radical feminism and utopianism is that the concepts overlap partly. Both concepts are clearly advocating change of not only smaller details, but the given structure. A dissatisfaction with the status quo is a fundamental part, leading to collective change in both utopian ideals and radical feminism. Thereby, feminism has good prerequisites for being utopian due to its anti-authoritarianist approach, and its need for new system structures, that can deconstruct patriarchal interweavements and characteristics. Developing feminist utopianism is therefore an obvious advancement of radical feminism or might also be considered as being somewhat the same. Both feminism and utopianism will be used mainly for the core understanding and classification of the topic, while the created framework for feminist utopianism shall be basis for coding Zapatista documents. I expect to find parts of feminist utopianism within the structure of the autonomous Zapatista municipalities especially regarding the dynamic deconstruction of patriarchal implications. That being said, I also expect to find evidence for the faced challenges and possibly different interpretations of feminist utopianism within the Zapatista structure. I assume that a structure, created within the patriarchal system cannot simply decide to leave that exact system behind.

Methods

This chapter aims at clarifying and justifying the scientific approach utilized to answer the main research question as well as the introduced sub questions. First, a description of the case will be given, to draw conclusions to what method of data collection will produce results which are suitable with respect to the research objectives. Then, the chosen method will be introduced and defined, followed by presenting the operationalization in form of a coding scheme, which the analysis will be based on. Lastly, the research activities are laid out to give a transparent overview of what was done to assess suitable data and what limitations the research faced.

Case Description

The thesis aims at providing knowledge about how the autonomous Zapatista municipalities embody ideals of feminist utopianism within their adopted structure. This knowledge is not based off numerical data, but rather relies on interpreting findings within textual data. Due to the nature of the topic, as well as the interpretive character of the proposed research question, a qualitative research design is the one most obvious for this study. Qualitative studies analyze non-numerical data to produce in-depth information of a specific sample (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Since the aim of this research is to find characteristics and implications of feminist utopianism within the structure of the Zapatista municipalities, policy documents, speeches, and statements by the EZLN will have to be analyzed in an attempt to connect the theoretical framework with the Zapatista conception of equitable societies. In a preceding research of articles concerning similar topics it became evident that qualitative research designs are most common when it comes to analyzing the Zapatista structure from a feminist perspective. This course of action therefore is the only one appropriate for answering the main research question as well as the already introduced sub questions.

Since there is no existing dataset on this topic, a textual analysis was conducted. The aim of conducting a textual analysis was to code as well as interpret textual data to gain insights regarding the connection between the Zapatista structure and ideas of feminist utopianism. The groundwork was laid with an in-depth literature review of existing theories and concepts which were analyzed by looking for specific keywords and short phrases, allowing for a conceptualization of feminist utopias. The chosen articles and books used for the theoretical framework are peer-reviewed and mostly published in established journals. For each theory there is also at least one author, whose work was groundbreaking in the field, evident by a high amount of citation and referencing of the respective works. The theoretical framework is

thereby based on trustworthy sources, helping to conceptualize feminist utopianism. The developed framework allowed an analysis consisting of the contents of Zapatista (policy-) documents as well as speeches and statements. The analysis permitted an examination of how the key terms found within the theories are translated within the Zapatista documents, how they are defined and applied, and what that implies on the general structure. Since there is a high number of informational sources, as well as open access documents written and published by members of the Zapatista Movement, or the EZLN itself, there is enough foundational written information for an in- depth qualitative textual analysis. The documents themselves were retrieved from official EZLN websites and the website of the *Schools for Chiapas* to ensure the accuracy and validity of the collected data. Therefore, the dataset consists of Zapatista documents and speeches, more specifically all six *Declarations of the Lacandon Jungle*, the *Women's Revolutionary Law*, a revision of the San Andres Peace records by the General Command of the EZLN, an Interview with Major Ana Maria of the EZLN, two speeches by Comandanta Esther, four essays analyzing the role of women within the Zapatista municipalities, as well as an EZLN textbook focusing on the participation of women within the autonomous governments. The *Declarations of the Lacandon Jungle* function as EZLN manifestos, which were published to civil society and contain not only the identified struggles and problems, but also initiatives, proposals, and alternative solutions. They are not specifically directed towards women's struggles, thereby pointing out the general essence of the Zapatista's agenda and if or how women are included in that. The interview and the speeches were chosen due to the historical importance of Major Ana Maria and Comandanta Esther in the EZLN ranks, shedding light onto how women of the EZLN view not only the Women's Revolutionary Law but also how it translates into everyday life within the municipalities. The EZLN book "*Participation of Women in Autonomous Government*" introduces the specifics of how women participate in policymaking and agenda setting within the municipalities. It encloses information about reached goals, ongoing struggles, and perspectives within the local governance structures of the Zapatista municipalities and gives a detailed view on the achievements of the Women's Revolutionary Law and its interdependence with the autonomous and self-determined governments. All those documents were written in Spanish originally. I used English versions, translated by members of the EZLN, thereby ensuring that the essence of the Zapatista agenda is captured, and no important arguments are lost in the process.

Conceptual Content Analysis and Coding Scheme

The literature was analyzed in terms of how the constructed framework of feminist utopianism plays a part within Zapatista documents, which is why a conceptual content analysis was used as the method of data analysis. This method is characterized by quantifying and counting the presence of a chosen pre-existing concept (Bazeley, 2013), which is the best option regarding the nature of the introduced research question. This process of checking the occurrence of keywords close to the chosen theories was done through the utilization of atlas.ti as the preferred research tool. A coding scheme was developed within atlas.ti, helping with operationalizing feminist utopianism into measurable data. A code describes a word or short phrase that represents an intermediary step between theory and data, and thereby assigns attributes to language-based visual data (Saldana, 2012).

After carefully categorizing the contents of the earlier defined conceptualization of Feminist Utopianism, the following codes have been created and used for the analysis of the Zapatista's embodiment of Feminist Utopian ideals:

Figure 4
Coding Scheme

Code Nr.	Category	Summary	Anchor example
(1)	Integration of Women on the Agenda	Checking for the occurrence of policies, or speeches directly addressing women	"Women, regardless of their race, crees, color, or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle" (Zapatista Revolutionary Laws, 1993, p.1)
(2)	Core Concepts of Feminism	How are the concepts of sex, gender, race, discrimination, equality, difference, and choice included?	"Dialogue, tolerance, and inclusion as a new way of making politics" (4th DLJ, p.7)
(3)	Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures	Consensual frustration with the status quo in form of patriarchal hierarchies and oppression	"we women have been suffering discrimination, exploitation, and neglect at the hands of the bad government" (Esther 10 th , p.3)
(4)	Deconstruction	A willingness to create alternative solutions by dismantling the status quo	"destruction of tyranny and the overthrow of all evil governments" (2 nd DLJ, p.1)
(5)	Participation of Citizens	Letting everyone who is part of the community take part in policy making and especially in part-shaping decisions	"we invite national civic society, [...], all Mexicans to construct this new political force" (4 th DLJ, p.8)
(6)	Shared Power and Interdependence	Executing power through the consensual willingness of change and alternative solutions, without clear (patriarchal), but rather flexible hierarchies	"a political force with local, state and regional organization which grows from the base, which is its social force" (4 th DLJ, p.9)
(7)	Dynamic Change	Not steering towards a fixed goal but achieving constant adjustments to create a path towards overall situational improvement	"participate in a dialogue to formulate its organic structure" (4 th DLJ, p.10)
(8)	Education	Are the mechanisms given to advocate alternative solutions on one hand and empower women on the other?	"they give classes with the boys and girls, there they explain how women's rights are" (EZLN, 2013, p.38)
(9)	Challenges	What challenges do the Zapatistas recognize in terms of reaching their ideals especially regarding women's rights?	"there are compañeras who still do not have that right to decide, but rather machismo still exists" (EZLN, 2013, p.52)
(10)	Alternative Solutions	What are the Zapatista's ideas and approaches when it comes to constructing a new society?	"a new constitution that will guarantee the legal fulfillment of the people's will" (2 nd DLJ, p.6)
(11)	Consensual Dissatisfaction	Frustration with the status quo regarding the Mexican government, politics, and societal norms	"the pillar of the Mexican dictatorship that we suffer from" (1 st DLJ, p.2)

Each code addresses one or multiple conceptual characteristics I found crucial in conducting this conceptual content analysis and attempting to answer the research question. Category 1 (*Integration of Women on the Agenda*) investigates whether the Zapatista's agenda acknowledges that females require additional attention due to their added exposure to marginalization and discrimination, and whether they purposely put women's struggles onto their general agenda. By analyzing the main concerns of Feminism through category 2 (*Core Concepts of Feminism*), category 1 is extended by checking whether the contents included in the struggle correspond with the core concepts of feminism. That way it can be assured that women are not randomly mentioned, but rather put into the context of the issues coming with concepts such as sex, gender, race, discrimination, equality, difference, and choice. Category 3 (*Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures*) functions as a way of determining whether the patriarchal structures in form of hierarchies and its consecutive oppression are consensually met with frustration and dissatisfaction. This plays hand in hand with category 4 (*Deconstruction*), where the willingness to break up those prevailing structures is analyzed. Categories 5 and 6 are concerned mostly with the structures within the community, and how those might facilitate a more fluent transition to alternative solutions. While category 5 (*Participation of Citizens*) examines whether every citizen has the right to take part in decision making especially when it comes to fundamental, path-shaping decisions, category 6 (*Shared Power and Interdependence*) targets not only their participation, but the means and conditions of that participation. Within this category, it was inspected, whether the hierarchies within policy making are flexible or not. This aims at examining if the anti-authoritarianist character of feminist utopianism is being met, and whether power is being executed not through a strict hierarchy, but rather by creating an environment where the willingness of acting in favor of change and alternative solutions is consensual and communal. As explained in the theoretical framework, utopianism is a process rather than a state. Therefore category 7 (*Dynamic Change*) was included, to ensure whether the goal of situational improvement is approached through a flexible path, open to adjustments within the process rather than a fixed plan of how to move forward. To create the opportunity for constant adjustments as well as a flexible but still expedient path, it is important to ensure that following generations within the communities understand why and how to proceed. That is what the 8th category (Education) covers. It must be examined whether the structures and mechanisms are given to provide education for all, not only to keep advocating change and the possibilities of alternative solutions, but also to ensure women's empowerment through education in the early stages of childhood. Category 9 (*Challenges*) targets the identification of challenges in implementation, to thereby analyze

whether certain concepts might only work in theory but are not translated into reality. To include the Zapatista's view of a perfect society into the analysis, category 10 (*Alternative Solutions*) was added to be able to illustrate what their measures and policies are supposed to achieve. That way it can be analyzed whether those correspond with the core concepts of feminism as well. The 11th and last category (*Consensual Dissatisfaction*) functions as a control category to differentiate results from category 3 (*Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures*), which should include only the discontent with oppression due to patriarchal systems, from discontent with the status quo in general.

Research Activities and Limitations

The named documents were imported into atlas.ti, which functioned as a surface for the coding. By categorizing the content of the chosen sources of data collection, in this case Zapatista documents, into groups and therefore assigning them with attributes found within the theoretical framework, the data represents the occurrence of the chosen theories within the documents, hence allowing an analysis thereof, leading to findings that are helpful in answering the main research question. Each document was read thoroughly and words/phrases fitting into the introduced categories or codes were marked. That way, the occurrence of the particular codes can be counted, giving estimates of how the local governance structure of the Zapatistas may embody ideals of Feminist Utopianism.

The conducted analysis may be limited due to multiple reasons which must be addressed. While limitations are part of scientific research and must not necessarily be detrimental, they must be acknowledged and minimized. I consider three limitations within three different phases (theoretical framework, data collection, and data interpretation) of this thesis as the main hindrances for the analysis. One of those limitations concerns laying the groundwork and defining the theoretical framework. Both feminism and utopianism are highly extensive topics on their own. Due to the rather small scope of this thesis, those theories had to be compressed. Not being able to include all the different interpretations and viewpoints on the theories consequently leads to the probability of missing some characteristics that could potentially be crucial to feminist utopianism as a political theory. Another important limitation I want to name lays within the chosen documents for the analysis. Most sources of data used within the analysis are of written or spoken character from within the EZLN, in comparison to observational texts. Therefore, while the analysis might show that Zapatista municipalities could or could not be classified as a feminist utopia on paper, this does not necessarily have to translate into reality. The data sources might be portrayed through the Zapatista's own bias, therefore distorting the

results. A third limitation I would like to mention would be that conceptual content analyses always require interpretation of the results to some extent. This interpretation is highly influenced by cognitive bias and research bias, possibly affecting the validity and reliability of the results. The Western background many of the political theories mentioned above are intentionally or unintentionally based on, for example, might distort the analysis of structures within post colonialist Mexico, where some definitions, theories, or systems might be of varying dimensioning or interpreted differently.

Analysis

This chapter introduces the findings from the analysis. They prove how multifaceted the Zapatistas struggle for autonomy and justice really is, and how deeply that struggle is connected to the fight for equality. Equality in that sense, however, is not limited to “only” gender equality, but concerns equality for all, especially regarding indigenous communities within Mexico. What became evident is how deeply rooted the dissatisfaction with the status quo – and within that with patriarchal structures – really is, and what the Zapatistas are already doing or planning on doing to change those structures within their own.

Those findings will now be presented in this analysis section. This part of the thesis is structured in a way to display the key findings from atlas.ti with respect to the sub questions as well as the already introduced theories. To be able to do so, the introduced categories from the coding scheme were assigned to one or more sub questions sharing a similar thematic background. Thereby the theories and respective results from the analysis can be connected to develop answers for the research objectives of each of the presented questions.

Feminist Ideals within the Zapatista agenda

With respect to sub question three (*How does the Zapatista struggle for autonomy overlap with feminist ideals?*), the theoretic findings from the sections Feminism and Zapatismo and Women’s Rights must be connected with the analytical findings. The categories *Core Concepts of Feminism (2)* and *Integration of Women on the Agenda (1)* have therefore been selected as being the most suitable to do so. As already illustrated within the theoretical sections, feminism as a political theory necessitates the challenging and changing of society (Bryson, 2003) to break up cycles of systematic male domination and female subordination and gives justifications for restructured political institutions and practices that lead to collective improvement. The core concepts of feminism were identified as sex, gender, race, discrimination, equality, difference, and choice.

Within the Zapatista movement, autonomy is at the basis of the fight for women’s rights (Bellamy, 2021), indicating that breaking up the patriarchy goes hand in hand with breaking up colonial remnants. The Zapatista women’s fight for equality is therefore applicable to exploitation and oppression not only regarding gender but also race and class (Park, 2007).

Within the analyzed documents, 14 out of 16 texts feature the categories (1) and (2), proving the importance of the integration of women’s struggles into the Zapatistas fight for autonomy.

Figure 5

Results Coding Feminist Ideals

Category	Occurrence in Documents	Number of Occurrences
Core Concepts of Feminism	14/16	88
Integration of Women onto the Agenda	14/16	123

To assess the overlap of the Zapatistas general goals and visualizations of an equitable society with feminist ideals, the occurrence of the earlier identified core concepts of feminism within the documents was checked. It became obvious, that the Zapatistas fundamentals are inclusive, comprehensive, and fluid. Regarding *sex* and *gender*, it became apparent that both concepts are highly discussed and put on the agenda in an effort to establish equal rights for everyone taking part in the struggle, while keeping in mind that the fight for women’s rights is not necessarily just for women but that the whole revolutionary process can only go forward and benefit on the basis of equal rights. While there are “women who represent the women”, they “represent all of our people as well, women, children, everyone” (EZLN, 1994, p.5). The Zapatistas also acknowledge that feminism does not stop at investigating power struggles between men and women, but that there are other groups being oppressed under the patriarchal system. They address that “women, young people, the indigenous, homosexuals, lesbians, transsexual persons, migrants, and other groups that exist all over the world” (General Command of the EZLN, 1998, p.5) are being persecuted and despised and must therefore be included in the fight.

Regarding the core concept of *race*, the EZLN state that “brothers and sisters of other races and languages, of other colors” (General Command of the EZLN, 1996, p.3) are welcome to join in and that “women, regardless of their race, creed, color, or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle” (Zapatista Women’s Revolutionary Law, 1993, p.1).

The Zapatistas call close attention to the *discrimination* of women and other minorities, demanding that “in all reforms of the Constitution which are made, women should be included specifically, thus eliminating any official discrimination against them” (EZLN, 1996, p.7). The “triple oppression suffered by indigenous women” (EZLN, 1996, p.7) is due to them being female, indigenous, and poor and must therefore be eliminated from different angles and with varying approaches. *Equality* must be instated before the law but also in private, by “asking for

a “reconstruction” of society, a different ordering where dominant and dominated do not exist” (Marcos, 2014, p.8). The Women’s Revolutionary Law is one step in ensuring the equality before the law, giving women “all the rights and obligations which the revolutionary laws and regulations give” (1993, p.1).

When discussing equality, taking *difference* into account is of high importance. Equality can’t just be instated by ignoring different circumstances faced by women and men in the prevailing systems. The different life realities must be considered in order to slowly create spaces that allow the same rights for everyone. Therefore, while women participate in the general Zapatista struggle for autonomy, they must be given a space where women are able to discuss their specific concerns and troubles. In this light, the EZLN endorse a “special consignment for women, administered and managed by them” (EZLN, 1996, p.7), thereby “widening the concept of “equality” with their notion that “we are equal because we are different” (Marcos, 2014, p.14).

The last core concept of feminism analyzed within the chosen documents was *choice*. This is a key theme reoccurring in most Zapatista proposals and laws, since the right to decide was one that was mostly reserved for (non-indigenous) men. The right to choose is therefore consolidated and fortified not only within the Women’s Revolutionary Law, but all conceptualizations of how the everyday interaction within families or communities is to function. The Women’s Revolutionary Law allows women to choose their employment, to decide the number of children they want to have and to freely choose their partner and not be forced into marriage (1993, p.1).

The analysis demonstrated that not only are all core concepts of feminism found within the Zapatista proposals and policies, but that they take on a very forward-thinking and comprehensible approach in executing those ideals. Thus, to answer sub question 3 it can be concluded that the Zapatistas struggle for autonomy overlaps with feminist ideals in various instances by showcasing all core concepts of feminism, but not only that; “The Zapatista women’s struggles and demands for their rights do not fit neatly in any feminist theories or practices; they transcend them all” (Marcos, 2014, p.15).

Utopia and the Zapatistas

Regarding sub question 1 (*How can utopia be defined from a viewpoint of political science?*) the general definition of utopia as a political theory was already laid out in its corresponding section within the theoretical framework. “Grounded Utopia” was the conceptualization that

proved to be most comprehensive and applicable, identified by a collective dissatisfaction with the status quo and a continuous development towards new societal constructs and spaces that allow for general situational improvement (Davis, 2021, Fernando et. al., 2018, Maahs, 2019). Utopia is thereafter not a state, but rather a “productive impossibility” (McManus, 2003, p.16), disrupting consistent patterns to find alternative solutions.

Within the analysis, the categories which were found to be most significant based on the theoretical findings, were *consensual dissatisfaction* (11), *deconstruction* (4), *alternative solutions* (10), *dynamic change* (7), *participation of citizens* (5), and *shared power and interdependence* (6).

Figure 6
Results Coding Utopianism

Category	Occurrence in Documents	Number of Occurrences
Consensual dissatisfaction	10/16	41
Deconstruction	8/16	36
Alternative Solutions	10/16	61
Dynamic Change	9/16	24
Participation of Citizens	14/16	61
Shared Power and Interdependence	9/16	38

The table shows that all categories were found in multiple documents and of multifarious occurrences. At the basis there is the ascertainment that “the constitution that exists doesn’t reflect the popular will of the Mexican people” (General Command of the EZLN, 1994, p.6), and that the structure of the Mexican government is “corrupt, immoral, unfair and illegitimate” (General Command of the EZLN, p.2), unable to resolve the societal and political problems of the Mexican people. The consensual dissatisfaction is therefore demonstrated clearly and strongly, concluding that “neoliberal globalization is a war of conquest of the entire world, a world war, a war being waged by capitalism for global domination” (General Command of the EZLN, 2005, p.5). The critique of the status quo focuses on the elitist approaches of the Mexican government, influenced by global capitalism and neoliberalism, resulting in a frame of mind where the Zapatistas claim that they “will not put aside [their] demands nor [their] arms until [they] have democracy, freedom, and justice for all” (General Command of the EZLN, 1994, p.3).

This dissatisfaction is directly linked to their conception of *deconstruction*. The EZLN states that “the oppression and the arrogance will be overthrown” (General Command of the EZLN, 1995, p.7), and that “by suicide or execution, the death of the current Mexican political system is a necessary precondition, although it is not sufficient, for the transition to democracy in our country” (General Command of the EZLN, 1994, p.3). What the Zapatistas do view as sufficient, however, are their proposed or implemented *alternative solutions*. Their goal is to create new political spaces that create a form of governing by obeying (General Command of the EZLN, 2005, p.3), meaning that the only interest of those in charge is to serve and obey the community without any material interest. The government therefore consists of “temporary positions which are rotated, so that everyone learns and carries out this work” (General Command of the EZLN, 2005, p.3), thereby ensuring participation, as well as examination and monitoring by the public. This structure also prevents hierarchization, creating a horizontal “free and democratic space for political struggle” (General Command of the EZLN, 1994, p.4). The EZLN proposed and implemented new forms of government by creating forums such as a National Democratic Convention, a National Liberation Movement, and an Indigenous National Forum to ensure communication across the country but also stresses that the importance of this form of governing lies in local governance within “the self-governance of the communities. In other words, no one from outside comes to govern, but the people themselves decide, among themselves, who governs and how” (General Command of the EZLN, 2005, p.3).

This already ties in with their advocacy for the *participation of citizens*. The EZLN clearly states that their “sovereignty resides in civil society” (General Command of the EZLN, 1994, p.2), and that “decisive action by all honest Mexicans is necessary in order to achieve a real and profound change in the destinies of the nation” (General Command of the EZLN, 1995, p.5). With that, it is made apparent that the responsibility to create new structures and political forces lies within the community, and that unity in the struggle makes change possible. This unity can be realized through *shared power and interdependence*. The participation of citizens can only flourish when it is paired with interdependence. Therefore, the goal is “not to make arrangements from above to be imposed below, but to make accords to go together to listen and to organize outrage” (General Command of the EZLN, p.10). Thereby they created “a space for citizen political action where there may be a confluence with other political forces of the independent opposition, a space where popular wills may encounter and coordinate united actions with one another” (General Command of the EZLN, 1996, p.8).

A core element of utopia as a political theory is *dynamic change*. In order to create a process free of authoritarianism, the path must be flexible regarding the public will, changing circumstances, or generational rearrangements. Since all power emanates from the people, in a rotational and self-monitored system, “the people have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government” (General Command of the EZLZ, 1993, p.1), thereby ensuring the flexibility of the process. The EZLN also states that “there is not a book that directs [them], [they] go along learning with the work” (EZLN, 2013, p.7), showcasing again, that public opinion steers the path towards situational improvement.

All in all, when comparing the conceptualization of utopia from a political perspective with the Zapatista’s structure, it is apparent, that all the key elements identified with political grounded utopia are existent to some extent. Their dissatisfaction with the elitist government, acting out of longing for power and money has led to a framework consisting of the unified participation of the people in a freely democratic new space, ensuring its flexibility and resilience going forward. The key statement the EZLN base their agenda setting and structure building behind is therefore: “alone we cannot struggle, we always go together hand-in-hand” (EZLN, 2013, p.45).

Feminist Utopianism and the Zapatistas

After having analyzed the overlap of the Zapatista agenda with feminist ideals, as well as their embodiment of political utopianism, this section will merge those findings as well as complete them with additional findings to be able to make statements of their embodiment of feminist utopianism with respect to sub question 2 (*How does feminist utopianism differ from other conceptualizations of utopia?*). Feminist utopianism was differentiated from grounded utopia by specifying that the consensual dissatisfaction refers to patriarchal structures and its system of domination and subordination which must be deconstructed and overcome.

Within atlas.ti the categories most meaningful and informative regarding feminist utopianism according to Alessa Johns’ (2010) conceptualization were identified as *dissatisfaction with patriarchal structures* (3), *education* (8), *participation of citizens* (5) (in this case especially of women), *shared power and interdependence* (6), and *dynamic change* (7). Since the categories participation of citizens, shared power and interdependence, and dynamic change were already analyzed in the last section, those findings will only be extended through specific mentioning of women within those categories. The main focus of this section will be on dissatisfaction with patriarchal structures and education.

Figure 7*Results Coding Feminist Utopianism*

Category	Occurrence in documents	Number of occurrences
Dissatisfaction with patriarchal structures	10/16	57
Education	12/16	45

Multiple of the analyzed documents include some kind of critique on the status quo. 10 out of the 16 documents showed clear indications for a dissatisfaction with patriarchal structures specifically. “It has been many years that we women have been suffering discrimination, exploitation, and neglect at the hands of the bad government” (Comandante Esther et. al., 2003, p.3), is how Comandanta Esther summarizes the subordination of women as a direct result from patriarchal institutions. She also states that contempt and marginalization are part of a woman’s life from birth on, since those in charge do not view women as worthy of putting in the effort to care for them (2001, p.6). This exploitation, marginalization, and neglect which she describes negatively affects the core concepts of feminism such as choice and discrimination, taking away the “freedom to participate, to talk, as if it was thought that men were more than [women]” (EZLN, 2013, p.6). Especially choice is mentioned frequently, as a key element of why and how women are being subordinated and oppressed. This is seen for example in topics such as marriage or the decision of how many children to bear, which were decisions that were left to the husbands or fathers of women without taking into account the wishes or preference of their daughters or wives (Comandanta Esther, 2001, p.7). The Women’s Revolutionary Law was implemented to counteract the systemic oppression of women, and to “take up the path of resistance to the patriarchy” (Bellani, 2014 p.3). The dissatisfaction with patriarchal structures therefore translated into extensive women’s rights bills and the development of mechanisms that ensure women’s participation and equality.

One core element in guaranteeing the continuation and expansion of women’s rights is education as “a tool so that both men as well as women become conscious of the importance of women’s work” (EZLN, 2013 p.2). The Zapatista education system is construed to educate boys about women’s rights to break up patriarchal cycles, as well as educate girls and women “because they are the ones who must prepare themselves to one day come to be an authority of the people” (EZLN, 2013, p.53). By doing this, following generations will grow up within an

education system covering how to counteract patriarchal behaviors, eventually leading to equitable communities, detached from systemic subordination of women. Therefore, education is crucial, since only “if we achieve educating our children like this, we are going to achieve the change” (EZLN, 2013, p.57).

While education is used as a tool to ensure continuous change, participation of women plays a big role in achieving equality as well. The Women’s Revolutionary Law states, that “women have the right to participate in the matters of the community and have charge if they are free and democratically elected” (1993, p.1), as well as “women will be able to occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces” (1993, p.1). Legally, women have the same participatory rights and obligations that men have, and while there are still shortcomings in practice, Bellani perceived that the Women’s Revolutionary Law did also bring about actual change, since women “started going to rallies, taking the microphone and speaking, holding political office” (2014, p.2). This inclusion of women in official offices must be seen as a progressive and *dynamic change*. “Some compañeras have taken the commitment and have positions like women’s commissions, autonomous councilmembers, health and education commissions, etcetera, but it is still necessary to strengthen and achieve organizing the remaining compañeras in the towns” (EZLN, 2013, p.71). To strengthen the inclusion, interdependence is a key element since all must unite to fight for the same goal. This is why it is important that problems within the towns are “resolve[d] together, among compañeras and compañeros” (EZLN, 2013, p.50). Mutual support is needed “to go together walking, to seek the path where we are going to advance in our struggle” (EZLN, 2013, p.56).

Within the analysis of Zapatista documents, it became clear that “the Zapatistas insist on transcending these patriarchal traditions” (Marcos, 2014, p.10) and that in order to achieve this transcension, “it is necessary for us to educate ourselves, to prepare ourselves, so that in this way no one is going to come any longer to cheat us or exploit us as women” (EZLN, 2013, p.41). It is clear to see that their essence embodies that of feminist utopianism. Although their main struggle concerns autonomy, liberty, and democracy, that goes hand in hand with breaking up power struggles standing in the way of female autonomy and empowerment.

Feminist Utopianism within the Autonomous Municipalities

While the last sections demonstrated how grounded utopian thought can be found within the Zapatista’s philosophy, and that the extension of feminist utopian values also run through their

agenda, those findings must now be related to the methods of the autonomous municipalities in order to illustrate whether and how those embody feminist utopianism as a political theory. The governance structure of the autonomous municipalities is parted into the local governments of the towns within the Caracoles (the self-determined regions), where *compañeros* and *compañeras* are being appointed to be delegates for the Juntas de Buen Gobierno which is the higher instance of government, overlooking all municipalities. As already illustrated in the previous sections, the municipal governments are based on a rotating form of self-governance, in which delegates receive no salary in order to prevent monetary incentives or financial power-imbalances. The rotational system ensures that there is dynamic change and shared power, with the government being exposed to frequent staff alternation. While this might get in the way of a routinized workflow, it also guarantees interdependence within the communities as well as counteracts authoritarian measures. It also establishes a more diverse composition of appointed delegates, including all members in the process.

According to the Textbook “Participation of Women in Autonomous Government”, now “there are *compañeras* integrated in all the leadership positions” (EZLN, 2013, p.27), not only working together with the *compañeros* but also having exclusive meetings with just the women taking part in government, to be able to discuss their specific concerns and troubles. While there are challenges especially regarding education, since there are many women especially from the earlier generations who cannot read or write, “in each region two *compañeras* are named” (EZLN, 2013, p.43) for the Junta, to ensure their participation going forward. In some municipalities, a women’s quota was introduced, implicating that if “the municipalities have 12 council members, [...] there are 6 *compas* and 6 *compañeras*” (EZLN, 2013, p.49), as well as a policy that if a woman gives up her position in the Junta de Buen Gobierno, this position must be filled with another woman. The already introduced Women’s Revolutionary Law demonstrated how women are being put on the agenda by promising them “all the rights and obligations which the revolutionary laws and regulations give” (Zapatista Women’s Revolutionary Laws, 1993, p.1), and especially the expectation for women to do the same work as men shows that their role within the municipalities is to be seen as equally responsible members. To achieve that, educational discrepancies must be overcome. Due to the local governance structure of the municipalities, the education system is very personal and attentive. Whenever a new delegate is named for government, they are enrolled in “classes with the rest of the authorities” (EZLN, 2013, p.13) to ensure a direct learning experience. Through that, new delegates receive information regarding exactly those topics, in which help, or new skills

are needed, thereby including even those in the municipal governance, who did not think that they had the competence and expertise to do so.

Especially regarding the core concepts of feminism, it became evident how inclusive their structure really is, by claiming that “a plural, tolerant, inclusive, democratic, just, free and new society is only possible today, in a new nation” (General Command of the EZLN, 1996, p.7). The mentioning of a “new nation” is also an indicator of deeply rooted utopian thought, by stressing that the struggle of the present can only be solved within completely new societal and governmental spaces. This new nation must consist of all; “the workers, campesinos, teachers, students, housewives, [...], women, old persons, homosexuals and lesbians, boys and girls” (General Command of the EZLN, 1998, p.9), stating that they “are going to continue fighting for the Indian peoples of Mexico, but not just for them and not with only them, but for all the exploited and dispossessed of Mexico” (General Command of the EZLN, 2005, p.10).

Challenges

In only four out of the 16 analyzed documents challenges were mentioned. However, it is important to analyze those that were brought up to get a picture of whether the implementation of measures is well realized and what the struggles are in reaching the set goals. The main challenge has been identified with achieving equal participation of women due to various circumstances. “The compañeras who are participating are still a minority, the majority cannot do it because various difficulties” (EZLN, 2013, p.43), with the most important conditions influencing female participation laying within remnants of patriarchal thoughts, family complications, and education.

“When a compañera is tasked with work, sometimes the compañeros do not let their wives or daughters leave to go do it” (Marcos, 2014, p.3), showing how conservative gender roles are still playing a big part in realizing complete equality. Since the patriarchal structure is one deeply rooted in almost all societies worldwide, it is seen as “a bad custom that persists in the mind” (Marcos, 2014, p.5) which is hard to leave behind in such a quick time frame. Coming with that is that “the men who do not support the compañeras in the household are still a majority” (EZLN, 2013, p.71), making it harder for women to participate in decision making and governing, especially if they have children. “Here is still a really big distance between the intention of actually being better, and really respecting the Other – in this case women – and what our real practice is” (Pellarolo, 2006, p.2), demonstrating again that discrepancies of such

caliber are not fixed with the implementation of equality rights but that a complete change of thought is necessary in order to change what has been taught and lived for centuries.

Aside from ongoing patriarchal structures especially within families, education is a key challenge which must be overcome. Girls were not obligated to go to school in Chiapas or were facing major obstacles due to infrastructural shortcomings before the uprising, making it harder to take on leadership positions “sometimes from lack of ability or from not knowing how to read” (EZLN, 2013, p.7). To achieve full basic education through all generations, it will still take a while, however, with the structures, the EZLN has instated in all the municipalities it is foreseeable that the state of education will continue to improve over the next years.

The Zapatistas themselves say, that “what [they] have accomplished, has not been accomplished 100%” (Marcos, 2014, p.3), but what counts for utopian thought is the process and the willingness to get there by continuous improvement. The fact that the organization itself is aware of which areas still need improvement shows that the basic conditions are in place to bring about changes and solutions in the long term.

Conclusion

Key Insights and Reflection

This thesis aimed at taking a close look at feminist utopianism from a political perspective to be able to determine whether and how the autonomous Zapatista municipalities embody its characteristics. The theoretical insights on feminism and utopianism allowed the development of a framework on feminist utopianism, characterized by a dissatisfaction with the patriarchy as the status quo, and a deconstruction of said status quo by creating dynamic alternative solutions to gain situational improvement for all. In achieving this goal, education plays a big factor in terms of supporting advocacy and change and ensure the continuation of general schools of thought, as well as the integration of citizens within the process to create an interdependent, non-authoritarian environment, keeping the cycle of deconstructing and reconstructing open, fluid, and dynamic.

When applying this framework on the local governance structure of the autonomous municipalities ruled by the EZLN, it became apparent that all characteristics of feminist utopianism are met to some extent in the Zapatistas' theory. The structure of the municipalities is designed for continuous change, advocating citizens participation in every step of the way. The Zapatistas main goal is found within autonomy and democracy and within that fight, feminist ideals are embodied as a tool to reach said goal. By strengthening every member of the municipalities regardless of their gender, race, or class, and by uniting the communities, the Zapatistas are striving towards a political and societal space characterized by full autonomy, democracy, and equality, in which the will of the people comes first, and governing is done by obeying that will.

Even though feminist ideals are used more as a tool to reach the main goal of autonomy and democracy, instead of an identifying characteristic of the Zapatistas, they do embody feminist utopianism from various angles. Within the analysis it became apparent, that the dissatisfaction with the – in the Zapatistas' view – undemocratic and corrupt government is including dissatisfaction with “machismo” and patriarchal structures. To deconstruct those, women played a major role in the EZLN army and the establishment of the autonomous municipalities from the beginning on, and are included in governing, decision-making, and communal work to make them equally responsible members of the communities. This participation is strengthened by the introduction of women's quotas in government, as well as individual education programs, counteracting the lower education standard many women faced. The

Zapatistas are advocating for women's rights, not only through internal education structures and laws, but also by giving women the space to publicly voice their opinion.

While the municipalities are facing challenges in implementing those laws and motions of equality, the structures are given to keep the dynamic process going. The political importance of any kind of utopia is – as illustrated in the theory section - not necessarily perfectly reaching that goal. Utopianism is more process-oriented and encourages thinking outside the box, and coming up with new policies, solutions, or ideas to counteract societal problems or political shortcomings. This can be seen within the governance structure of the Zapatistas' autonomous municipalities, by their progress in identifying the problems within the status quo, distancing themselves from it and reconstructing structures and institutions which are more likely to succeed in achieving their goal of democratic, autonomous, and equal societies.

The earlier in this paper identified knowledge gap concerned a clear conceptualization of feminist utopianism as well as its possibilities in implication and execution within the Zapatista municipalities. Since there are no scientific articles on how the Zapatista philosophy and structure overlap with feminist utopianism, this paper is a first step in doing so, while at the same time showing how much more research needs to be done to further close the gap. But even with this knowledge, practical implications of this research can already be drawn. The importance of giving utopian and feminist utopian conceptualizations a space within political theory and practice is immense. Utopianism poses a great possibility in counteracting incrementalism, through direct alternative solutions to political and societal shortcomings from angles, which are usually neglected in the practical field. Feminist Utopianism can be used to try creating more equitable and just societies by giving room for dynamic and participatory change, fitted to public interest. This research showed that movements like the uprising of the EZLN should not be left unnoticed as they hold great political potential in opening the mind of others to alternative approaches. The Zapatista's rotating government structure, paired with policies specifically targeting female participation has made a great difference in showing the potential of deconstructing predominant systems which are not in favor of the greater public. The question is whether the implication of feminist utopian ideals only flourishes within local governance structures since this makes the integration of citizens in the decision-making process easier to grasp. An answer to this question can only be generated with further research on the topic, but it seems obvious that greater societal problems are easiest fixed when those suffering under them are involved in solving them.

Another question which came into mind while researching the topic was: Should equality be utopian? Shouldn't equality be the norm and not a utopian process? It should be but it is not.

Discrimination, marginalization, and subordination are a sad reality of all minority groups. And even feminist utopianism is a theory, developed within the patriarchy, making it a patriarchal construct. It will need a long time, and a lot of new approaches to get rid of all patriarchal remnants still anchored in most people's thinking and acting. The Zapatistas embody such an approach. It is definitely not the only one that will lead to results, but it proves that the status quo of societies is not one that must be accepted under all circumstances. The EZLN's uprising and the global stir they created with their view of equitable and just societies shows that citizens hold great power if they have the resources and the capacities to take it. Creating new structures is possible and can be fruitful, and the embodiment of feminist utopianism within the Zapatista autonomous municipalities can be seen as a catalyst in the fight against injustice and discrimination.

Limitations and Future Research

This paper used knowledge, which was not new per se, but connected findings of other scholars to then develop a framework of feminist utopianism within political theory, as well as conceptualize its possible implications and implementation within the Zapatista municipalities. By closely reviewing previous research and conceptualizations of other scholars, the research question could be answered by conducting a conceptual content analysis. This was a qualitative, literature-based research, which is limited as already elaborated on within the methodology section in terms of compressed theoretical frameworks, an analysis based on Zapatista documents instead of observational articles, and interpretation of written text. In general, this paper analyses how the Zapatista municipalities embody feminist utopianism from their own point of view. By choosing to utilize mostly EZLN documents, statements, and speeches in the analysis, the main focus of the collected data was on the Zapatista's own conceptualization of feminist ideals as well as on what they are viewing as the most pressing issues that need solving. This is important, since it ensures as best as possible to not impose colonial thoughts and western standards on their individual struggle, while at the same time demonstrating their very own alternative solutions to issues such as marginalization and discrimination. To strengthen the findings however, more observational field research would be important. It would also be interesting for future research to track the change in recent years in the municipalities as well as how their struggle might have translated into the world.

Generally, more scientific research on utopianism and feminist utopianism must be conducted in the future. What this world needs is to start a more direct and straightforward approach in fighting oppression. Feminist utopian thinking in political theory can open doors to alternative

thought processes, by stimulating creative development and imaginative awareness to other possibilities and approaches. To make politics more innovative and steer it based on public interest, one must critique established ways of doing things and deconstruct them. The Zapatistas decided to do so and create communities that are turning to be more equitable and dynamic than the status quo. Their fight as well as their solution deserves further research and publication, not only to give them credit for what they were able to achieve, but also to demonstrate that a new equitable and just world is possible, if we are brave enough to include feminist utopian ideals into day to day governing and living.

“Our organization made us as compañeras wake up, made our eyes wake up regarding where we were, that it was not good how we felt incapable of doing that work, that yes we can as compañeras” (EZLN, 2013, p.7)

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Appendix

Appendix A – list of consulted data sources used for the coding process in alphabetical order

Document Nr.	Source
1	Bellani, O. (2014, April 10). The Rights of Zapatista Women. <i>Latinamerican Press</i> . Retrieved June 4, 2023, from https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/6112-2/
2	Comandanta Esther. (2001, March). <i>Comandanta Esther in the Congress of the Union</i> . Congress of the Union, Mexico City , Mexico. https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/comandanta-esther-speech-congress-2001/
3	Comandante Esther, Comandante Bruce Lee, Comandante Mister, Comandante Tacho, & Comandante David. (2003, January 14). <i>Speech on the 10th Anniversary of Zapatista Uprising</i> . Anniversary of the 1994 Zapatista Uprising, San Cristobal, Mexico. https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/comandanta-esther-speech-10th-anniversary/
4	Davies, J. (2014). From El Barrio to La Realidad, Women Lead Struggles to Transform the World. In <i>Americas Program</i> . Retrieved June 2, 2023, from https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/el-barrio-la-realidad-women-lead-struggles-transform-world/
5	EZLN. (1994, February 28). <i>Interview with Major Ana Maria of the EZLN</i> . https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/interview-major-ana-maria/
6	EZLN. (1996). <i>The Dialogue of San Andres and the Rights of Indigenous Culture</i> . Retrieved June 1, 2023, from https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/indigenous-rights-san-andres/
7	EZLN. (2013). Freedom According to the Zapatistas. <i>Participation of Women in the Autonomous Government</i> , 3, 72.
8	General Command of the EZLN. (1993). First Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle. In <i>Schools for Chiapas</i> . Retrieved May 24, 2023, from https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/declaration-lacandona-jungle-2/

9	General Command of the EZLN. (1994). Second Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle. In <i>Schools for Chiapas</i> . Retrieved May 25, 2023, from https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/declaration-lacandon-jungle-2/
10	General Command of the EZLN. (1995). The Third Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. In <i>Schools for Chiapas</i> . Retrieved May 25, 2023, from https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/declaration-lacandon-jungle/
11	General Command of the EZLN. (1996). Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. In <i>Schools for Chiapas</i> . Retrieved May 25, 2023, from https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/fourth-declaration-lacandona-jungle/
12	General Command of the EZLN. (1998). Fifth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. In <i>Schools for Chiapas</i> . Retrieved May 25, 2023, from https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/declaration-lacandona-jungle/
13	General Command of the EZLN. (2005). EZLN communique - 6th Declaration of the Selva Lacandona. In <i>Schools for Chiapas</i> . Retrieved May 25, 2023, from https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/sixth-declaration-lacandona-jungle/
14	Marcos, S. (2014). The Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Law as it is lived today. In <i>Schools for Chiapas</i> . Universidad de la Tierra/CIDECI. Retrieved June 2, 2023, from https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/zapatista-womens-revolutionary-law-lived-today/
15	Pellarolo, S. (2006, March 8). <i>Zapatista Women: A Revolutionary Process Within a Revolution</i> . International Women's Day, Los Angeles, United States of America. https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/zapatista-women-revolutionary-process/
16	<i>Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Laws</i> . (n.d.). Schools for Chiapas. Retrieved June 2, 2023, from https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Zapatista-Womens-Revolutionary-Laws.pdf

Appendix B – table of occurring codes within each document

Document Nr.	Occurring Codes	Number of Occurrences
1	Core Concepts of Feminism	3
	Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures	2
	Dynamic Change	1
	Education	1
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	2
	Participation of Citizens	1
2	Core Concepts of Feminism	1
	Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures	7
	Education	1
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	3
3	Consensual Dissatisfaction	1
	Core Concepts of Feminism	1
	Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures	3
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	3
4	Alternative Solutions	1
	Participation of Citizens	2
	Shared Power and Interdependence	2
5	Consensual Dissatisfaction	1
	Core Concepts of Feminism	10
	Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures	7
	Education	2
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	8
	Participation of Citizens	1
6	Alternative Solutions	3
	Consensual Dissatisfaction	2
	Core Concepts of Feminism	4
	Deconstruction	2
	Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures	2
	Dynamic Change	1
	Education	1
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	6
	Participation of Citizens	4
	Shared Power and Interdependence	1
7	Alternative Solutions	14
	Challenges	37
	Consensual Dissatisfaction	2
	Core Concepts of Feminism	19
	Deconstruction	3
	Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures	18
	Dynamic Change	6
	Education	28
	Integration of Women onto the Agenda	58
	Participation of Citizens	18
	Shared Power and Interdependence	9
8	Consensual Dissatisfaction	2

	Deconstruction	3
	Participation of Citizens	4
	Shared Power and Interdependence	1
9	Alternative Solutions	6
	Consensual Dissatisfaction	6
	Core Concepts of Feminism	2
	Deconstruction	9
	Dynamic Change	4
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	2
	Participation of Citizens	8
	Shared Power and Interdependence	5
10	Alternative Solutions	3
	Consensual Dissatisfaction	10
	Core Concepts of Feminism	2
	Deconstruction	6
	Dynamic Change	1
	Education	1
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	2
	Participation of Citizens	3
	Shared Power and Interdependence	1
11	Alternative Solutions	9
	Consensual Dissatisfaction	4
	Core Concepts of Feminism	4
	Deconstruction	6
	Dynamic Change	2
	Education	2
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	2
	Participation of Citizens	3
	Shared Power and Interdependence	8
12	Alternative Solutions	1
	Consensual Dissatisfaction	2
	Core Concepts of Feminism	2
	Education	1
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	6
	Participation of Citizens	2
	Shared Power and Interdependence	2
13	Alternative Solutions	8
	Challenges	1
	Consensual Dissatisfaction	11
	Core Concepts of Feminism	7
	Deconstruction	3
	Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures	4
	Dynamic Change	4
	Education	5
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	14
	Participation of Citizens	10
	Shared Power and Interdependence	9
14	Alternative Solutions	11

	Challenges	4
	Core Concepts of Feminism	17
	Deconstruction	4
	Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures	8
	Dynamic Change	4
	Education	1
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	8
	Participation of Citizens	1
15	Alternative Solutions	5
	Challenges	2
	Core Concepts of Feminism	6
	Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures	5
	Dynamic Change	1
	Education	1
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	3
	Participation of Citizens	1
16	Core Concepts of Feminism	10
	Dissatisfaction with Patriarchal Structures	1
	Education	1
	Integration of Women on the Agenda	11
	Participation of Citizens	3