

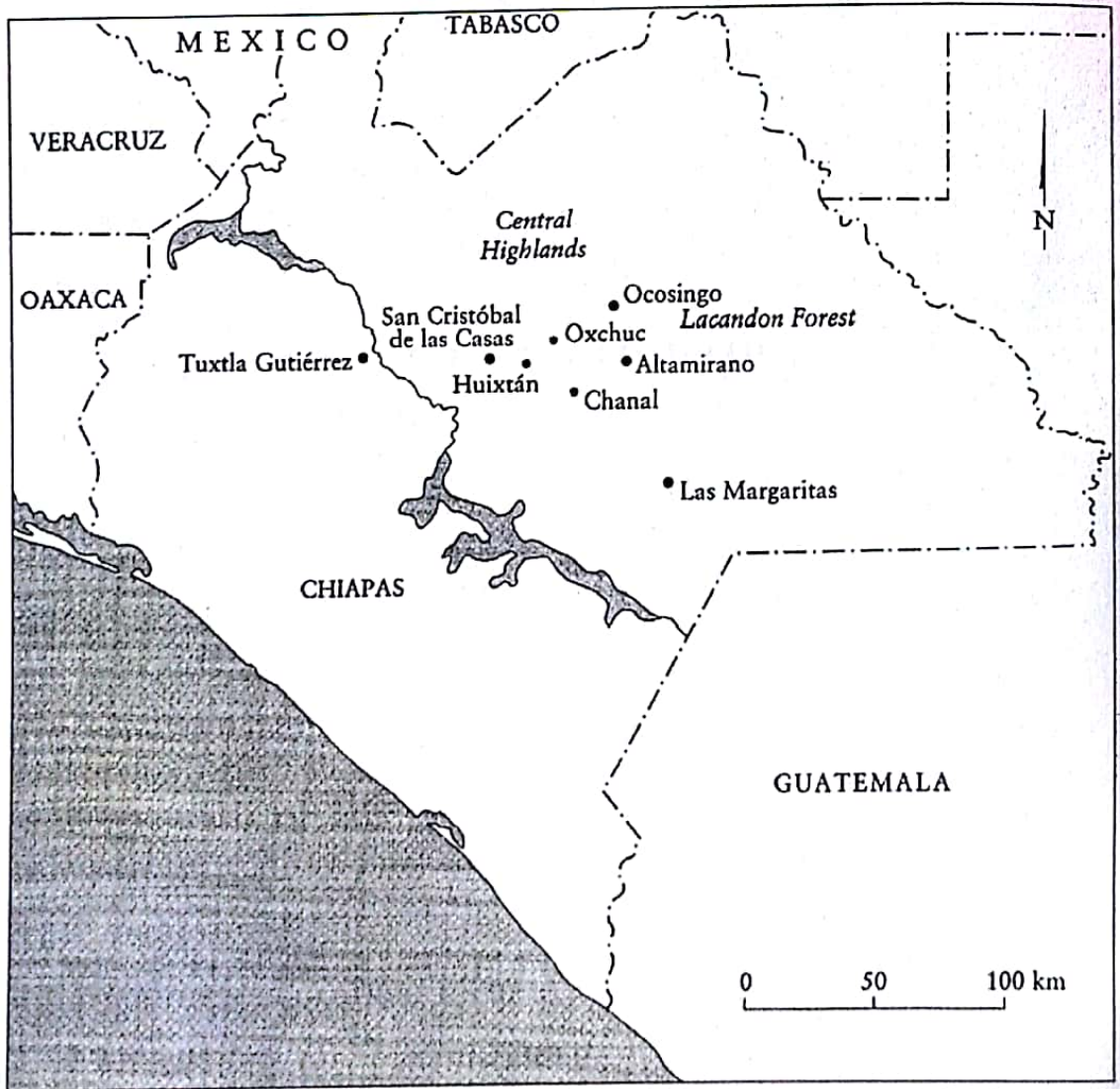
DISSIDENT WOMEN



GENDER AND CULTURAL
POLITICS IN CHIAPAS

Edited by Shannon Speed,
R. Aída Hernández Castillo,
and Lynn M. Stephen

DISSIDENT WOMEN



Area of the Zapatista rebellion and the location of Chiapas in Mexico.

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DISSIDENT WOMEN
*Gender and Cultural Politics
in Chiapas*

EDITED BY SHANNON SPEED,
R. AÍDA HERNÁNDEZ CASTILLO,
AND LYNN M. STEPHEN



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*Dedicated to the courage, creativity, and vision of the
dissident women of Chiapas*



*En memoria de la Comandanta Ramona,
Mujer disidente, que trastocó muchos mundos*

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANCIEZ	Alianza Nacional Campesina Independiente Emiliano Zapata (National Independent Emiliano Zapata Peasant Alliance)
ANIPA	Asamblea Nacional Indígena Plural por la Autonomía (Pluralistic Indigenous National Assembly in Support of Autonomy)
ARIC-UU	Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo-Union de Uniones (Rural Association of Collective Interest-Union of Unions)
CCRI	Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena (Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee)
CEB	Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (Ecclesiastical Base Communities)
CEOIC	Consejo Estatal de Organizaciones Indígenas y Campesinas (State Council of Indigenous and Campesino Organizations)
CIAM	Centro de Investigación y Acción para la Mujer (Center for Women's Research and Action)
CIOAC	Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos (Independent Center of Agricultural Workers and Peasants)
CNI	Congreso Nacional Indígena (National Indigenous Congress)
CNMI	Congreso Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas (National Congress of Indigenous Women)
COCOPA	Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación (National Commission of Concord and Pacification)
CODIMUJ	Coodinadora Diocesana de Mujeres (Diocesan Council of Women)
CONAMI	Congreso Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas [formerly CNMI] (National Congress of Indigenous Women)

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DIF	Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (National System of Integral Development Services of the Family)
EZLN	Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation)
FNDALIDM	Frente Nacional de la Liberación y Derechos de la Mujer (National Front for the Liberation and Rights of Women)
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
ILO	International Labor Organization
INI	Instituto Nacional Indigenista (National Indigenist Institute)
IUD	Intrauterine device
Maya-ICBG	Maya International Cooperative Biodiversity Group
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
OCEZ	Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata (Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization)
OIMI	Organización Independiente de Mujeres Indígenas (Independent Organization of Indigenous Women)
OMIECH	Organización de Médicos Indígenas del Estado de Chiapas (Organization of Indigenous Healers of Chiapas)
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution)
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)
PROGRESA	Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación (Program for Education, Health, and Nutrition)
PRONASOL	Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (National Solidarity Program)
PVEM	Partido Verde Ecologista de Mexico (Green Party of Mexico)
RAPS	Regiones Autónomas Pluriétnicas (Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions)
SER	Servicios del Pueblo Mixe (Services of the Mixe People)
UCIZONI	Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Zona Norte del Istmo (Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus)
UP	Unión del Pueblo (The People's Union)
UU	Unión de Uniones y Grupos Campesinos Solidarios de Chiapas (Union of Ejidal Unions and United Peasants of Chiapas)

INDIGENOUS ORGANIZING AND THE EZLN IN THE CONTEXT OF NEOLIBERALISM IN MEXICO

LYNN M. STEPHEN, SHANNON SPEED, AND
R. AÍDA HERNÁNDEZ CASTILLO

The public appearance of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in 1994 served as a catalyst in the organization of indigenous women in Mexico. Zapatista women became important advocates of indigenous women's rights through the Women's Revolutionary Law.¹ This charter, written in consultation with Tojola'bal, Chol, Tzotzil, and Tzeltal women who were members of the EZLN, was made public on January 1, 1994, and has been of great symbolic importance for thousands of indigenous women in peasant, political, and cooperative organizations. Women from throughout Mexico have voiced their support for the demands of their *compañeros* (brothers and sisters in struggle) and the collective interests of their communities. Parallel to their participation in the struggle for land and democracy, these women have begun to demand the democratization of gender relations within the family, the community, and social and political organizations. Indigenous women have also developed and practiced strategies of everyday resistance. In some cases, they have been able to appropriate spaces in policy and decision making that previously had been the sole province of the state. Both through collective organizing and through individual actions in their daily lives, indigenous women have been confronting hegemonic ideologies that legitimate and perpetuate the subordination of women.

The women's organizing described in this book has taken place in two key contexts: the most highly developed and coordinated national indigenous movement for self-determination and rights in Mexico's history and the consolidation of the neoliberal economic model in Mexico. Here, we provide a brief description of the political, economic, and cultural context that led to the emergence of the EZLN in 1994 and its links to the neoliberal economic model implemented in the 1980s in Mexico.

nous—unlike the composition of municipal governments in many other places in Chiapas. The UU-ARIC integrated four paths of change, “the Catholic faith, Guevarist and Maoist socialist ideologies, and an ethnic consciousness opposed to Ladinos [persons of nonindigenous descent]” (Leyva Solano 2003: 164). Throughout the highlands and elsewhere in Chiapas, other types of indigenous organizations also prospered, among them writers’ cooperatives, radio shows, theater groups, and history projects (see Benjamin 2000).

Mexico’s adoption of neoliberalism began in the mid-1980s and was consolidated under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This economic system built on free trade policies benefited a few, but for the most part, it disadvantaged Mexico in relation to the United States; and most Mexicans, especially the rural poor, lost ground. In 1989, when the International Coffee Organization failed to agree on production quotas, prices fell by 50 percent. For the thousands of indigenous small coffee producers in Chiapas, the drop in prices was devastating. The inability of regional peasant organizations that had emerged in the 1970s and 1980s to resolve the problem convinced some to begin to listen to an alternative peasant organization, the Alianza Nacional Campesina Independiente “Emiliano Zapata” (Emiliano Zapata Independent Peasant Alliance), or ANCIEZ, that was serving as a cover for the growing ranks of the clandestine Zapatista National Liberation Army.

NEOLIBERALISM IN MEXICO AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE EZLN

The 1980s, a decade of crisis and change in Mexico, culminated in the conditions that would impel the Zapatista uprising. Mexico’s ruling party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party), or PRI, had been able to maintain its hegemony for close to seven decades by developing a corporatist state that managed internal dissent through co-optation (and turned to coercion and repression when co-optation failed). Corporatism drew sectors of the population, in particular rebellious sectors, into the state project. For example, labor was drawn in through massive, state-sponsored unions; and indigenous people were engaged principally through the National Indigenous Institute (INI), whose goals were assimilation and modernization. However, the economic crisis of the 1980s left the Mexican state increasingly limited in its capacity to finance such social pacts (Collier 1994).

Mexico (see Sierra 2002). After a national bus tour by the EZLN that retraced Emiliano Zapata's entry into Mexico City, an address to the Mexican Congress by Tzeltal Comandanta Esthér, and an outpouring of national support for legislation of the 1996 San Andrés Accords, the Mexican Congress passed a greatly watered down version of the original accords that left most of the specifics regarding how indigenous autonomy might be realized to individual state legislatures. Comandanta Esthér's address to the Mexican Congress was a historical first—an indigenous woman at the seat of national government addressing primarily nonindigenous officials on the topic of rights and citizenship.

The so-called Law on Indigenous Rights and Culture, approved in April 2001 by the legislative branch and sanctioned by the executive branch, places a series of restrictions on the demands of indigenous peoples for autonomy, betraying the spirit of the San Andrés Accords.³ Although Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities and Regions had been declared in December 1994, they did not become the heart of the Zapatista project until after the government failed to implement the peace accords it signed in 1996. Communities in Chiapas and elsewhere declared themselves Autonomous Regions and began to implement parallel governments and set up their own systems of education, health care, and agriculture. The declarations and experiments in autonomy at the local level in Chiapas connected to a larger national movement for indigenous self-determination and rights. This is an important part of the context of women's organizing in Chiapas in the 1990s.

After 2000, the Fox administration responded to the demands for autonomy and the broader international movement favoring multiculturalism by making a rhetorical commitment to the cultural rights of indigenous peoples. This "commitment" is manifested not only in legislative reform but also in a series of *indigenista* programs that combine old developmentalism with a liberal multiculturalist discourse having little to do with the real demands of indigenous peoples (see Hernández Castillo, Paz, and Sierra 2004). Borrowing a phrase from the Zapatistas, President Fox promised "Never again a Mexico without you" in the opening of his National Program for the Development of Indigenous Peoples 2001–2006.

In August 2003, the Zapatistas announced the creation of five *caracoles* (literally "spiral shells" but meaning points of communication) that are the seats for five Juntas de Buen Gobierno (Good Governance Councils).⁴ Each of the five juntas is composed of one to three delegates from each of the already existing autonomous councils in each zone. Currently there are thirty Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities

in Rebellion that are governed by the five juntas. Among other things, the functions of the juntas are to monitor projects and community works in Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities in Rebellion; monitor the implementation of laws that have been agreed to by the communities in their jurisdictions; resolve conflicts and disputes resolution in their jurisdictions; and govern Zapatista territory in rebellion under the logic of *mandar obedeciendo* (rule by obeying), a keystone of “good” governance that holds that authorities are to carry out decisions arrived at by consensus, not make them. At the celebration for the new Juntas de Buen Gobierno, Comandanta Esthér—who addressed the Mexican Congress in 2001 urging them to implement the San Andrés Accords—captured the sentiment of other indigenous women and men who had decided to establish their own systems of government and justice:

Now we ourselves must exercise our rights. We do not need permission from anyone, especially not from politicians who only deceive the people and steal money. That is why, indigenous brothers and sisters of the people of Mexico, we are calling on all of you to enforce the law of the San Andrés Accords.

We have the right to govern and to govern ourselves according to our own thoughts in every municipality and in every state in the Mexican Republic. No one can prevent us, let alone imprison us, for exercising rights which we deserve. Now is the time to put the autonomy of the indigenous peoples into practice and to act on it throughout the entire country of Mexico. No one needs to ask permission for their autonomous municipalities. (ZNET/Chiapas Watch 2003)

Esthér’s words mark the assertion of a system of government and laws governing people’s behavior that is redefining the meaning of citizenship as a concept embedded not only in relations between the individual citizen and the state but also in collective identities, rights, and responsibilities determined at the local level and shaped by local ethnic and cultural conventions. Although the five *caracoles* are gathered under the umbrella of one system of regional government, local cultural differences may influence the way communities are governed, the way authority is constituted, and the specifics of local legal systems. Thus while all communities governed by the Juntas de Buen Gobierno must follow Zapatista revolutionary law (the Women’s Revolutionary Law, the Agrarian Revolutionary Law,⁵ and others), the cultural forms through which these laws are interpreted can vary. For example, in the Tzotzil highland community of Oventik, the traditional authority of el-

ders who assume civil and religious *cargos* (responsibilities) is honored. In lowland Tojola'bal communities, structures emerging from the *ejido* system have more weight in local governance (see chapter 5, this volume; Mattiace 2003b). For women who have often been excluded from traditional forms of government, newer hybrid political forms that involve men, women, and children in community assemblies as well as in formal committees and organizations offer avenues for increased participation. Although women may be empowered by these opportunities (see chapters 5 and 6, this volume), they may also find that discussions that arise on difficult issues, such as domestic violence, do not have the results they desire (see chapters 7 and 8, this volume).

The Zapatista rebellion and the emergence of national networks dedicated to the struggle for indigenous rights and autonomy have deeply marked the 1990s in Mexico in the larger context of economic neoliberalism. Within these two processes, indigenous women have emerged as creative political forces in Mexico, providing new models for governance, for conceptions of citizenship and rights, and for economic development and cultural autonomy. They are dissidents across many spheres of life. This book is dedicated to their spirit, leadership, and inspiring visions of how to build a better and more just world.

NOTES

1. This document, along with three other important statements by indigenous women on the issues discussed in this book, is included in the section "Key Women's Documents" following this preface.

2. *Ejidos* are lands redistributed by the government from large landholders to peasants. They were created after the Mexican Revolution to satisfy the demands of landless peasants who had seen their communal village lands eaten up by large agricultural estates and/or who had served as laborers on those estates. For many communities, *ejido* land refers to territory tied to the community. Since the Mexican Revolution, more than 70 million hectares have been transferred from large estates to slightly more than 3 million peasant beneficiaries. In 1992, however, the Mexican government implemented a revision in Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution that eliminated the government's obligation to redistribute land.

3. For example, the responsibility for determining the form in which the autonomy of indigenous peoples will be recognized is granted to state-level legislatures, the collective right to lands and territories is not recognized, and legal status is denied for their normative systems. As most of the state-level legislatures continue to be under the control of regional caciques (long-term political bosses), the autonomy acknowledged in paragraph A of the second article of

the new law will remain an empty concept if there is no legal backing for its implementation. Perhaps most problematic is that the law deems indigenous peoples subjects of “public interest” (*interés público*), a category also occupied by orphans, rather than “public right or law” (*derecho público*). In this manner, the reforms fail to recognize indigenous collectivities as subjects of legal rights (see Regino 2001).

4. In poetic prose, Subcomandante Marcos introduced the concept “caracol” in July 2003: “They say that the most ancient ones said that others, more ancient than they, appreciated the figure of the *caracol*. They say that they say that they said that the *caracol* represented entering the heart, that this was what the first to have knowledge said. And they say that they say that they said that the *caracol* also represented the heart going forth to walk through the world, that was what they said, the first to live. And not only that, they say that they say that they said that with the *caracol* they called to the collective so that the word would be one and agreement would be born. And they also say that they say that they said that the *caracol* helped the ear to hear even the most distant word. That is what they say that they said” (“Chiapas, la treceava estela: Un caracol,” *La Jornada*, July 24, 2003).

5. The Agrarian Revolutionary Law, created by the EZLN, calls for land to be redistributed to all types of people regardless of their political affiliation, religious creed, sex, race, or color; and to be redistributed to landless peasants and farmworkers who apply for it as collective property for the formation of cooperatives, peasant societies, or farms and ranching collectives that must be worked collectively and must be used for production of foods necessary for the Mexican people. Further, individual monopolization of land and means of production are not permitted (EZLN 1999:253–254).

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SHANNON SPEED



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R. AÍDA HERNÁNDEZ CASTILLO



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LYNN M. STEPHEN

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INTRODUCTION

R. AÍDA HERNÁNDEZ CASTILLO,
LYNN M. STEPHEN, AND SHANNON SPEED

The emergence of indigenous women as new social actors is the expression of a long process of organizing and reflection involving Zapatista and non-Zapatista women that is analyzed by the contributors to this volume, who are activists and anthropologists with long-term field experience in Mayan communities. Through archival research and ethnographic data, they shed light on the emergence of gender-specific demands and the appropriation by indigenous women of discourses of human rights and women's rights. The result is a unique blend of gendered social movement activity that we have put forward as dissident women who defy categorization as traditionally "feminist" or "leftist." These dynamics reflect other transformations that are taking place in indigenous communities: economic change linked to free trade, widespread migration, and experience acquired through organizing that has been gestating since the 1970s. Mayan women have become important political actors in a regional and national indigenous movement, no longer simply accompanying their fathers, spouses, and sons but adding to community demands their own claims as indigenous women and struggling to change the elements of their "traditions" that exclude and oppress them.

DISSIDENTS OF MONOCULTURAL NATIONALISM: GENDER, ETHNICITY, AND NEW FORMS OF CITIZENSHIP

Like other women who have challenged conventional notions of politics narrowly focused on voting and formal political systems, Zapatista

women and others inspired by them in Mexico are expanding the arena that constitutes politics and are also exploring new forms of citizenship, rights, and responsibilities. Among the key arenas through which citizenship is being redefined in Mexico are movements for indigenous autonomy and self-determination. The national indigenous autonomy movement has been centered in two national networks, the National Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA) and the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) (see Gutiérrez and Palomo 1999; Hernández Castillo 1997). The ANIPA and the CNI, unfortunately, have emerged as competing national spaces for indigenous rights. The ANIPA grew out of non-EZLN autonomous municipalities in Chiapas—pluriethnic autonomous regions (RAPs)—based on a model developed by Tojola’bal and other ethnic groups related to that of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2003; Gómez Nuñez 2000; Díaz Polanco 1991; Mattiace 1998). The CNI came out of the Zapatista experience of autonomy and has been strongly influenced by Oaxacan monoethnic communities that often compete with one another (Stephen 1997b; Lomelí González 2000; Burguete Cal y Mayor 2003). Both of these networks have worked at the local, regional, and national levels to press for the implementation of the San Andrés Accords and have also been the sites of sustained efforts by indigenous women to reexamine what is meant by “indigenous customs and traditions” and to create avenues for increasing women’s political participation in community assemblies.

At the national level, the autonomy movements and networks have pushed for the broadening of Mexican political institutions and representative bodies to include indigenous peoples as members and to address their concerns. It is from this dynamic perspective of culture that organized indigenous women are adding their voices to demands for recognition of the cultural, political, and social rights of indigenous peoples. They have joined the Zapatistas in saying “Never again a Mexico without us.” This call has been taken up by indigenous women leaders and others who are demanding that the struggle for autonomy grapple seriously and centrally with the wide range of ways in which women have been excluded. They are making it clear that the nation’s homogeneous, centralist model is invalid. The promises of equality in the liberal definition of citizenship have lost their appeal to a broad sector of the Mexican population whose freedom to develop “individual capacities” has been restricted by economic marginalization, racism, and the lack of cultural capital to actively exercise the civil, political, and social rights described by T. H. Marshall (1950) and unknown to the majority of indigenous Mexicans.

In both the larger movement for self-determination and women's struggle to attain representation, leadership, and authority, the notions of "social citizenship" and "social rights" have been central. Independent Mexico has distinguished itself from the United States by having granted formal citizenship to indigenous peoples since independence in 1821 (a right the U.S. government did not grant to Native Americans until 1924). However, in Mexico state building entails creating a homogeneous "Mexican" populace through the discourse of *mestizaje*. This notion of a racial mix of Spaniard and Indian into one mestizo race supported assimilationism by rendering Indians as part of the distant past in the national imaginary. The discursive erasure of indigenous peoples was linked to political and legal exclusion from the nation. In the Mexican Constitution, Indians were not recognized and all Mexicans—a homogeneous national identity category—were equal as individuals before law.

As has occurred in many other parts of the world, women and indigenous people have revealed the fallacies in the republican discourse on equality. For the first time in Mexico's political debate, there is recognition of the racism and ethnocentrism concealed in the nationalist discourse on *mestizaje* and citizen equality (Gall 2002). In the name of equality and the need to build a modern, homogeneous, mestizo nation, indigenous peoples were denied the right to speak their own languages, and Spanish was imposed as the national language. Laws they did not understand and that failed to consider the cultural context of the accused were introduced. The authority of their political-religious institutions was not recognized and mestizo municipal authorities, in whom the political and economic power in entire regions was concentrated, were imposed on them. All these impositions were made in the name of the "right to equality." All Mexicans had to be treated equally, without regard to their cultural, economic, and social differences, which were subordinated to this citizenship imposed by law.

In response to the exclusionary discourse of liberal citizenship, the Mexican indigenous movement together with the EZLN have proposed the need to link their demands for autonomy to the recognition of their cultural and political rights as peoples, or *pueblos indígenas*.¹ The struggle for autonomy is not only a struggle against the state but also for the construction of new collective imaginaries that will profoundly change the ethnic, gender, and national identities of participants in the movement as well as in Mexican society overall (Rus, Hernández Castillo, and Mattiace 2003). Moving beyond the formal designation of the individual rights of citizens as part of the nation and as part of the contract between the Mexican state and individual citizens, the movements for

indigenous autonomy and of indigenous women are about the recognition of social and cultural rights—both individual and collective—that have not been formally legislated in the Constitution.

In contrast to undocumented Mexican migrants in the United States who are clearly not citizens but who are struggling to be recognized as legitimate political subjects claiming rights for themselves and their children based on their economic and cultural contributions regardless of their official legal status, Mexico's indigenous peoples are legal citizens but are struggling to establish larger social and cultural rights that are not formally defined as part of Mexican citizenship. Susan Eckstein and Timothy Wickham-Crowley (2003: 1) point out that struggles for social rights (which might include rights to subsistence protection and social consumption, rights to work-linked benefits, rights based on gender, and rights based on race and ethnicity) are sociologically contingent and "the productions of social construction, negotiation, contestation and possible reconstruction." In addition, they remind us that "both conceptions and the actual enjoyment of rights also hinge on historical circumstances, along with people's positions in social hierarchies and group identities" (1). In the case of Mexico's indigenous peoples, the kind of social rights associated with the current autonomy movements are clearly linked to Mexico's specific colonial heritage, the current peak in the inequitable redistribution of income and wealth in Mexico, electoral processes that recently resulted in the removal of the PRI after seventy years of hegemony, and prior social movements involving peasants, indigenous peoples, women, labor, and other sectors. The specific set of social rights pushed forward by indigenous women is thus bound to specific circumstances within Mexico and the kinds of political openings and opportunities uniquely created from 1994 to the present, including those circumstances stemming from the Zapatista rebellion.

The concept of cultural citizenship associated in anthropology with the work of Renato Rosaldo (1997), William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (1997), among others (in Mexico, Guillermo de la Peña [1999] has elaborated a similar concept of ethnic citizenship), is useful for understanding the strategy of the movements for indigenous autonomy based in Chiapas and women's place within it. It also suggests a way to reformulate our understanding of "the political" to extend to many cultural and social arenas of life. Cultural citizenship can be understood as everyday activities through which marginalized social groups can claim recognition, public space, and, eventually, specific rights (see Flores and Benmayor 1997). In the case of indigenous Mexicans, the notion of cultural citizenship emphasizes their struggle to achieve not only the

enjoyment of rights already assigned to them as Mexican citizens but also to embody the concept of citizenship in culturally grounded terms that recognize ethnic differences and provide legal flexibility in terms of how the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are actualized in local systems of governance, justice, and political economy. Although the concept has not been vindicated by these movements, in practice we can see that their demands point to the construction of a new type of cultural citizenship, in which being different in ethnic or linguistic terms with respect to the community's dominant forms does not jeopardize the right to belong, in the sense of participating in the democratic processes of the nation-state (see Rosaldo 1997).

This is distinguished from the concept of multicultural citizenship as posited by Will Kymlicka (1997) and other liberal theorists of multiculturalism (Taylor 1994). Kymlicka argues that collective rights should be recognized by states, because the individual members of those collectivities have the need and right to have the significance of their cultural contexts taken into account. In other words, individuals can only exercise their right to liberty if they can freely exercise their culture. But in this formulation, the emphasis remains on the individual, and Kymlicka (1997:192) is clear that such group rights should not extend to self-government, which is "a threat to social unity." There has also been a consistent argument within multicultural theory that states should have the right to oversee and intervene in the practices of "minority" cultures when cultural norms violate liberal notions of individual human rights (what Kymlicka terms "external protections" [7]). The question at the heart of this matter is whether a group's rights, in the words of Susan Moller Okin (1999:11), "trump the individual rights of its members." Okin concludes in her influential essay, "Unless women . . . are fully represented in negotiations about group rights, their interests may be harmed rather than promoted by the granting of such rights" (24).

The specifically gendered debate within the cultural citizenship demands of the larger indigenous autonomy movement reflects the problematic of the liberal model that Okin highlighted but also suggests ways of moving beyond it, precisely because women are participating in the debate. During the 1990s, many women and some men were deeply involved in questioning the gender inequalities reflected in federal, state, and local law in relation to indigenous peoples. Women were involved in the process of formulating the San Andrés Accords from 1994 to 1996 (see Gutiérrez and Palomo 1999; Rojas 1996; Lovera and Palomo 1997), in attempting to operationalize autonomous townships in Chiapas, and in the revitalization and interpretation of local *usos y costumbres*—

loosely translated as “customs and traditions.” Their questioning of federal and state laws regarding “Indigenous Rights and Culture” as well as local debates about “*usos y costumbres*” has covered a wide range of issues including domestic violence, forced marriage, equal participation in a wide range of political arenas, rights to housing, education, jobs, and medical care, and land rights (see Gutiérrez and Palomo 1999; Hernández Castillo 1997, 2002a). By insisting that discussions on autonomy address the multiple arenas of home, community, and nation, indigenous women have complicated the project of “Indian autonomy” by maintaining that ethnic rights and women’s rights can be protected all at once. While many people have counterposed “ethnic” or “indigenous” rights as collective and women’s rights as individual, indigenous women activists do not see this dichotomy and emphasize that both ethnic and gender rights potentially embrace collective and individual rights. Balancing the tensions between individual and collective rights and ethnic and women’s rights is at the heart of many of the chapters in this book. Exploring this tension in home, community, and nation, as the contributors do here, provides a horizontal slice of the complexity involved in the everyday struggle of indigenous women to assert their cultural citizenship in a variety of arenas such as in the rights to political participation (see Stephen, Zylberberg Panebianco, Speed, this volume), rights to cultural recognition as healers and keepers of local knowledge (see Forbis, this volume), and rights to decision-making power within social movements at the national government level and internationally (see Blackwell, Hernández Castillo, Millán Moncayo, this volume).

Women in the *de facto* autonomous communities of Nicolás Ruiz, La Realidad, and Guadalupe Tepeyac (see Speed and Stephen, this volume); the county of 17 de Noviembre, the official township of Altamirano (see Forbis, this volume); and in the regional forums, the National Coordinating Group of Indigenous Women (Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas) and the Continental Network of Indigenous Women (Red Continental de Mujeres Indígenas) (see Millán Moncayo, Hernández Castillo, and Blackwell, this volume), are teaching us how to rethink—from a gender perspective—the politics of cultural recognition of human collectives. Their perspectives break with the dichotomies tradition/modernity, individual rights/collective rights, and domestic/public, and they give us some clues for finding a way out of the old anthropological debates over cultural relativism and conceptual universalism. At one extreme of this debate we find sectors that—based on a conception of culture as a homogeneous entity of shared values and customs that is located on the sidelines in terms of power relations—

propose the need to suspend any value judgment with regard to another culture; and in the political sphere, they often idealize the practices and institutions of cultures considered non-Western (reminiscent of Rousseau's ideal of the Noble Savage that the West continues to look for in its former colonies). At the other extreme we find sectors that, from their liberal perspective, deny the right to having one's own culture and, in the case of Latin America, the rights of indigenous peoples to autonomy; and they justify acculturation and integration on the basis of a vindication of republican values and an equalitarian discourse of citizenship, assumed as universal values. In their political practice and in their everyday struggle, organized indigenous women are trying to move away from this dilemma and are proposing more creative ways to rethink ethnic and gender identities and ways to build an identity politics that considers diversity within diversity.

The studies brought together in this volume illustrate that indigenous women are pointing the way toward a rethinking of multiculturalism and autonomy from a dynamic perspective on culture. Although they demand the right to self-determination, they make this demand from a conception of identity as a historical construction that is taking shape and reformulating itself day by day. Indigenous women are not only constructing cultural citizenship, but differentiated citizenship in which ethnic and gender specificities are taken into account in the construction of a public, heterogeneous space in which interest groups can work together while maintaining their identities (see Young 1990; see also Benhabib 2002).

GENDER AND ZAPATISMO: A DISSIDENT SOCIAL MOVEMENT?

In the 1990s intellectuals writing about social movements frequently debated the meaning of what many termed "new social movements." Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), for example, argued that such movements were no longer characterized by their focus on class-based, material demands but were really about creating new forms of democracy that came out of people's experience of multiple subjectivities in which one particular aspect of identity was not the driving force for movements. Others, such as Sonia E. Álvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar (1998), wrote about the importance of culture and identity politics as the driving force behind a wide range of movements in Latin America: indigenous rights, gay rights, environmental rights, women's

rights. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (1997) also explored the rise of cultural politics, emphasizing the relationship between cultural difference and capitalism. They argued that the contradictory and uneven nature of the latest phase of capitalism (postmodernity) opens spaces in which “culture . . . constitutes a site in which the reproduction of contemporary capitalist social relations may be continually contested” (26).²

The Zapatista movement has often been termed the first “postmodern” social movement because of its use of the Internet as an organizing tool, its ability to put together national and international networks of support, and its mix of demands for indigenous rights and culture, for humanity, and against neoliberalism. Zapatista women have further complicated the labeling of the movement because of their insistence on examining women’s rights in conjunction with ethnic rights for indigenous peoples. It is important to point out that some of the gendered issues raised by Zapatista women are quite consistent with other issues raised by nonindigenous women’s movements in Mexico.

The second wave of Mexican feminism of the 1970s was first characterized by consciousness-raising groups of primarily middle-class women who also began to make cross-class connections in 1975, following the United Nations World Conference for International Women’s Year. The issues on which feminists initially focused included legalization of abortion, stricter penalties for violence against women, support for rape victims, and connecting the personal and the political. The mid-1970s saw the first feminist publication, the creation of centers for rape victims, and a large number of public demonstrations and assemblies.

The 1970s also saw women’s involvement in a range of other kinds of social movements, including relatives of the disappeared led by Rosaria Ibarra, women in leftist political groups, women as a part of liberation theology-inspired Christian base communities, in labor unions, and in grassroots urban organizations. These spaces for women’s political participation were not explicitly feminist, and women in them did not come into contact with self-defined feminist organizers in a sustained way until the mid-1980s. The devastating earthquake of 1985 in Mexico City stands as a watershed for social movement organizing in Mexico. The enormous response of Mexico’s citizens to the earthquake and the strong presence of women within these responses marks a new era of broader-based feminist organizing as well as the emergence of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) specifically focused on women. These efforts built on earlier organizing efforts in the 1980s that resulted in several new loosely allied networks that included the Network Against Violence Toward Women, the Feminist Peasant Network, and the Net-

work of Popular Educators (Lamas et al. 1995:336). These networks developed a discourse that by the late 1980s had come to be characterized as *feminismo popular*, or grassroots feminism, an important strain of second wave Mexican feminism that had lasting influence on rural women's organizing. Grassroots feminism "integrates a commitment to basic survival for women and their children with a challenge to the subordination of women to men" and "challenges the assumption that issues of sexual assault, violence against women, and reproductive control are divorced from women's concerns about housing, food, land, and healthcare" (Stephen 1997:2). It was not until the mid-1990s that ethnicity was included as an additional basis for women's inequality in the agenda of Mexico's women's movements, brought to the table by indigenous women from Chiapas and their nonindigenous, often openly feminist allies. The "feminismo popular" of the 1980s and early 1990s is clearly different from the "indigenous feminism" discussed below in terms of its content and origin but similar in the attempt to join women's rights with social rights from another arena.

Prior women's organizing around democracy in Mexico is also part of the context for the position on rights taken by Zapatista women in the 1990s. In 1987 women began to mobilize and participate in a widespread public debate about the importance and meaning of democracy in Mexico. Within organized women's sectors, "democracy at home" as well as "democracy in the government" were topics of heated discussion. Their focus was on building democratic processes at home, at work, and in the political system, working against all forms of violence, and generating conditions (economic and otherwise) that support life beyond survival (Maier 1994:41-45; Stephen 1989). While much of the successful coalition building between women's organizations was centered in the urban areas, the emergence of women's NGOs began to affect the kind of discourse and strategies promoted by some rural organizations that women were part of. Some of these connections also eventually filtered down to Chiapas, where women were a significant part of NGOs formed in the 1980s and 1990s.

The demands and framing of rights by Zapatista women as described here brings with it historical continuity both in terms of specific rural organizing in Chiapas (see Garza Caligaris and Toledo, this volume) and in terms of previous organizing done largely by urban women. The particular political juncture in Mexico that framed the emergence and maintenance of the Zapatista movement in Mexico in the 1990s and after 2000 and its insertion into an ongoing globalization process marked by significant speed-ups and interconnectivity in communications tech-

nology have also been significant in giving it a distinct content and strategy, in both its gendered and nongendered manifestations. The specifics of how Zapatista women have framed and organized for their rights is unique in Mexican history—especially with regard to the integration of ethnic and gendered rights as articulated at the grassroots level in indigenous communities in Chiapas. What remains important to keep in mind, however, is that this unique articulation of rights did not grow out of a vacuum but is connected to the larger context of rural and indigenous and feminist organizing in Mexico during the past thirty years.

ANTHROPOLOGIES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN MEXICO

Anthropology of women in the 1970s and later feminist anthropology made it possible for us to hear voices and see experiences that had been silenced and concealed by earlier androcentrism (see Moore 1999). These perspectives illustrated to us the importance of women's work for the reproduction of domestic economies and for the production and reproduction of the labor force in the capitalist system (see Boserup 1970; Goody 1976; Young 1990). They helped us to look at rituals through a different lens, to see the importance of women in various religious traditions, and to see the complementary roles that allow for *cargo* systems (see Collier 1968; Nash 1970). In terms of Mesoamerican ethnography, it was beginning in the 1980s that a new assessment was made of the contexts in which indigenous women exercise power within their own cultures, and we were able to see the way in which this power was affected by changes in the domestic economies from the unequal insertion of these economies in capitalist relations (see Bossen 1983; Ehler 1990; Flood 1994; Nash 1993; Olivera 1989). Most of these works have focused on analyzing everyday life in which resistance and subordination are expressed and, in some cases, contextualizing these dynamics within national and global processes (see Eber 1995; Rosenbaum 1993; Stephen 1991). However, anthropological studies in Chiapas have paid little attention to the collective organizing that indigenous women have been carrying out for several decades now, and which, since the Zapatista uprising in 1994, has become highly visible.³ This organizing made it possible for indigenous women to participate politically in a new way, and any attempt at silencing them in ethnographic terms became impossible.

Because of women's dramatic emergence into the public consciousness as members of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, some anal-

yses have focused their attention on Zapatista women's role as guerrillas. In *Mujeres de maiz* (1994), Guiomar Rovira was able to give us an extraordinary early picture of the experience of women in the EZLN. Karen Kampwirth (2002) situated Zapatista women's experience in the context of women's participation in guerrilla movements more generally, looking comparatively at Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Cuba, as well as Chiapas. Kampwirth suggests that the participation of women in the Zapatista army was similar in many ways to that of women in the earlier guerrilla movements, for example, in the percentage of women in the different guerrilla armies: about 30 percent in each case. But what marked the Mexican case as distinct was the significant fact that the majority of the women participating in the Zapatista army were indigenous. Eber and Kovic (2000) provided a much-needed collection that highlighted the diversity of women's experience in Chiapas since the uprising.

DISSIDENTS OF COMMUNITY NORMS: REINVENTING TRADITION

In this volume we look specifically at women who have taken a dissident position, not just as participants in the Zapatista movement or other organizations, but also in relation to community gender norms. Some of the women represented in this volume have abandoned the roles assigned to them by their culture—not to renounce their identity but rather to reinvent new traditions and reject “bad customs.” We could say that these women are also dissidents in relation to a form of nationalism that is exclusive and monocultural and that has concealed its racism for decades behind its discourse on *mestizaje* and acculturation. They are also dissidents in relation to the Mexican state; some of them have opted to confront the state by taking up arms, others through political organizing, thus revealing the limitations of a neoliberal economic model that fails to offer their peoples even the most minimal possibility for survival with dignity.

Each of these dissidences has involved decentering hegemonic discourses and confronting the relations of domination present at various scales of power (see Blackwell, this volume). Some of these women have been obliged to pay a high cost for “dissenting,” for example, political violence from the army and paramilitary groups and even domestic violence from their own life partners (see Hernández Castillo 2001). Many others have had to confront subtler forms of symbolic violence: rejection in their communities that is manifested through isolation and

rumors circulated by those who consider them a “bad example” for other women in the community to follow (see Artía Rodríguez 2001; Sánchez Nestor 2001; Hernández Castillo and Zylberberg 2004; Speed, this volume).

Various chapters in this volume refer to the Women’s Revolutionary Law made public by the EZLN on January 1, 1994, and reproduced here in Section 1. This law recognizes the rights of indigenous women to hold public positions, to inherit land, and to make decisions regarding their own bodies—rights that in many cases imply breaking with community tradition. As Margara Millán Moncayo points out here, this is a law that destabilizes the very core of patriarchal domination, implying a loss of control for the male head of the family in relation to daughters’ marriages and material resources, especially land, and giving women the opportunity to exercise local power. This law has symbolic importance, not only for Zapatista women, but also for many indigenous women who view it as a legitimation of the demands around which they have been organizing for several decades (see Garza Caligaris and Toledo and Hernández Castillo, this volume).

Paradoxically, at the same time that these women have been organizing to change community traditions and structures that exclude them, they are demanding the right to their own culture. The contributors to this volume analyze the various organizational contexts in which indigenous women, both Zapatista and non-Zapatista, have taken up the demand for the self-determination of indigenous peoples, while in their communities and organizations they are critically proposing changes in their own normative systems. In response to both autonomous and government discourse, organized indigenous women have pointed to the way in which gender inequalities are equally apparent in national law and in what is referred to as indigenous law (see speech by Comandanta Esthér, Section 1). Confronting the essentialist approaches by some sectors in the Indian movement that mythologize cultural traditions, these women have responded: “This is why we, together with other organized indigenous sisters who persistently advocate for changing customs, say that we want to open up a new path for thinking about customs from another perspective in which our rights are not violated, in which we are allowed our dignity, and we are respected as indigenous women. We want to change the customs that damage our dignity.”⁴

By questioning the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, these voices decentered the official discourse on indigenous cultures of indigenism and of many conservative sectors in their own communities, according to which there are only two options—to remain the same

through tradition or to change through modernity (see Millán Moncayo and Hernández Castillo, this volume). Through testimonies, political documents, and life histories, we show how indigenous women are vindicating their right to cultural differences while demanding the right to change the traditions that oppress or exclude them.

In response to racist discourse that uses a caricatured, ahistorical vision of what are referred to as "indigenous traditions and customs" to discredit the Zapatista demand for autonomy (see Speed, this volume), indigenous women have pointed to the dynamism of their normative systems, reminding us that these social constructions emerged in contexts of power relations and, like national law, have suffered constant modifications, reflecting the complex social processes experienced by indigenous peoples.⁵

In the Zapatista Autonomous Regions established in large areas of Chiapas under EZLN control, state powers are no longer recognized, and new local power structures and new community normativities have been established, most of which include an opening to participation by women.⁶ Lynn Stephen shows us how in the cases of La Realidad and Guadalupe Tepeyac the Tojola'bal women already had skills obtained through their participation in the colonization of the jungle and in the formation of new *ejidos*, as well as in other local power contexts, and this is what made it possible for them to assume the new opportunities for participation opened up by Zapatismo. The new "traditions and customs," such as consensus building in mixed community assemblies (with participation by both men and women), were enriched by the experiences and skills acquired by women in what were considered traditionally female contexts. Violeta Zylberberg suggests the unevenness of the processes of women trying to assume new roles and authority as they make some gains in individual communities while simultaneously facing consistent backlash and resistance both from men and from other women, often female relatives.

These processes of reinventing tradition have been extensively analyzed by historians and anthropologists, especially in regard to their political uses in colonialism (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Mani 1998). These works have demonstrated to us that we cannot continue to look for the factors determining the validity of traditions by focusing on the point in time in which they originated. In this sense, tradition should be considered not so much a descriptive term of an "essence" but an interpretive term for referring to a process (Handler and Linnekin 1984). Given that cultures are engaged in constant change, when we conceptualize something as being traditional, this does not so much refer to a

particular sense of time but rather grants it a specific symbolic value. When a specific practice is conceived of as "tradition," the very contents of the practice are altered. "Cultural categories such as that of tradition have a reflexive nature; we invent them to the degree that we experience them and think about them; the consciousness that people have of them as categories affects their contents" (Linnekin 1982: 250). Once we have recognized that traditions and what are referred to as legal customs are socially constructed, the challenge is to identify these constructions in the framework of power relations, and this will make it possible for us to understand why certain inventions are legitimized and others are not (see Ulin 1995). In this book we address the struggle that organized indigenous women are waging in their own communities as well as with the state, with the aim of legitimizing their new traditions.

DISSIDENTS IN RELATION TO THE NEOLIBERAL STATE: DEMANDING AUTONOMY

Indigenous demands for "inclusion" in the Mexican nation go beyond giving indigenous people representation in local, state, and federal governments and a new pact between indigenous citizens and the Mexican state. It includes the recognition of collective rights for indigenous peoples, which suggests a profound transformation in the very conception of the nation—something the neoliberal Mexican state has not been willing to accept. This is in marked contrast to other states in Latin America such as Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Guatemala that engaged in constitutional reform to recognize collective rights for indigenous peoples precisely in the process of neoliberalizing.

That the Zapatista movement made itself known publicly on January 1, 1994—on precisely the day the free trade agreement between Mexico, the United States, and Canada went into effect—made explicit its intention to link the struggle for indigenous rights with an anti-neoliberal struggle. The Zapatistas have focused their demands on achieving recognition of the political and cultural rights of indigenous peoples and to simultaneously promote the distribution of wealth by rejecting the economic model promoted by financial agencies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In the ten-year political struggle following the ten days of armed confrontation with Mexico's national army,

the EZLN has become a symbol around the world of the fight against neoliberalism. The Forum Against Neoliberalism and for Humanity, held in 1997 in the heart of the Lacandon jungle and attended by representatives from social movements in five continents, has been followed by many other initiatives, including the formation of regional coalitions against macrodevelopment projects such as the Plan Puebla Panama and trade agreements such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). In all these contexts, indigenous women have actively participated, taking their specific experiences of the way that economic policies are affecting their daily lives to roundtable sessions and workshop discussions (see Blackwell, this volume).

The Zapatistas' political agenda has revealed the false dichotomy between recognition of cultural rights and redistribution of wealth. On one side are those who prioritize redistribution and focus on the struggle for economic equality and against labor exploitation while often disregarding the importance of cultural demands. On the other side are those social movements that give exclusive (or nearly exclusive) priority to the struggle against cultural domination and to the vindication of differences founded on nationality, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (see Fraser 1996; Hobsbawm 1996) while leaving behind any reference to economic inequality.

The Zapatista movement's demand for autonomy, which has been taken up by a major sector of the national indigenous movement, synthesizes the search for cultural recognition with redistribution of wealth. From the Zapatistas' perspective, advocating autonomy entails the need to promote sustainable development that takes into account indigenous traditional agricultural practices and also other proposals for organic agriculture, thus confronting agrochemical transnational corporations. This is not easy to do, and many indigenous communities have come to believe that petrochemical inputs and mechanized agriculture are better than all traditional methods. The EZLN also proposes an economic autonomy that will allow them to appropriate the means for marketing their basic products such as coffee, eliminating the need for intermediaries. The vindication of their normative systems and forms of government places doubt on whether electoral democracy is the only road to broad-based political participation. By demanding recognition for their indigenous languages and cultural practices, they are not only asking for new legislation in this regard but also proposing the need to restructure the educational and health systems at the national level, to include recognition of diversity.⁷

Further, alongside their demands to the state, the Zapatistas have continued to pursue their autonomy project unilaterally, in practice. Given the government's reticence about recognizing indigenous rights and autonomy (as reflected in the Indigenous Law of 2001 that effectively set indigenous rights back in Mexico), the Zapatistas are now defining their autonomy without the component of state recognition. This is a significant departure from the constitutionalist models that have accompanied the establishment of indigenous rights in other neoliberalizing Latin American countries, such as Nicaragua, Colombia, Ecuador, and Bolivia (see Van Cott 2000a, 2001), and may reflect new directions in the definition and pursuit of indigenous autonomy.

ENGAGED FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY

The contributors to this volume share a commitment to the struggle for indigenous rights and for gender equality. Feminist theory, unlike some other forms of theorizing, is always explicitly tied to political struggle—the struggle for gender justice. In a recent volume titled *Gender's Place: Feminist Anthropologies of Latin America*, Rosario Montoya, Leslie Jo Frazier, and Janise Hurtig argue that “gendered ethnographic accounts produce critical analysis toward social change” because of the ethnographers’ long-term commitment to and ongoing relationships with the communities involved, combined with “a methodological and political principle” of directly engaging our “ethnographic subjects” (2002:4, 5).

But our feminist engagement is based in a political perspective that considers the plurality of experiences that mark gender identities. Several postcolonial feminists have coincided in pointing out that academic feminist discourses reproduce the same problems as modernist meta-discourses when, through an ethnocentric and heterosexist perspective, they assume that the experience of Western, white, middle-class women is the experience of women in general (see Alarcón 1990; Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Mohanty 1991; Trinh 1988).

We recognize that these “sisterhood”-promoting metanarratives can debilitate feminist struggle by excluding the experiences of other women and, by focusing exclusive analytic attention on a homogeneous understanding of gender as the main axis of domination, fail to create the necessary conditions to establish broader political alliances. An engaged feminist ethnography must recognize cultural and historical differences with the goal of being able to build larger political alliances.

INTRODUCTION

Kay Warren and Jean Jackson (2002:3) suggest that the challenge for us as anthropologists is to “document more fully than other observers can” indigenous activism. Here, we would like to contribute a fine-grained anthropological documentation of the struggle of indigenous women for their rights, and to do so in a way that is “engaged,” taking into consideration the politics of doing anthropological field research, representing others in our writing, and of the knowledge we produce. While pursuing different modes of engagement, the contributors to this volume share a commitment to the individuals, communities, and organizations that are the focus of our research. We seek to bring a critical analysis to processes of change to which we are, sometimes directly, often indirectly, committed. At times combining scholarly pursuits with other forms of activism, we also recognize that the knowledge we produce has political effects (whether intended or not) and thus can contribute to social change. In the latter sense, our research is what Hale (2001) calls “activist research,” in which “activist” is an adjective modifying research; it is thus not scholarship by researchers who are activists on the side but rather by researchers committed to creating knowledge that is of use to their “subjects” in struggles that they (the researchers) support.

An engaged approach also compels us to continually recognize the power differentials that inhere in the relationships we form with our collaborators in the field. While we may share some political goals and commitments, in many cases the researcher enjoys greater access to resources, greater mobility, and greater valorization of their forms of knowledge and communication. We cannot eliminate these inequities, but it is nonetheless important to keep them visible and open to discussion when possible throughout the research process. We share a conviction that a committed, engaged feminist research can contribute to greater social justice in both the forms of research it undertakes and the knowledge it produces.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This volume is organized in three sections. The first section highlights four key documents, The Women’s Revolutionary Law, Comandanta Esther’s 2001 speech to the Mexican National Congress, Women’s Rights in Our Traditions and Customs, and statements by three members of the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee on the occasion of the International Day of the Rebel Woman, March 8, 2001.

The second section presents broad, historical discussions, preparing the terrain for the more focused ethnographic case studies of the third section. Below are brief descriptions of Sections 2 and 3.

Section Two: Indigenous Women's Organizing in Chiapas and Mexico: Historical Trajectories, Border Crossings

This section opens with an analysis by R. Aída Hernández Castillo of the impact of the Zapatista uprising on the emergence of a national indigenous women's movement. This movement incorporates women from different indigenous regions of Mexico who are working together through the Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas (National Council of Indigenous Women, CNMI) and have taken up the challenge of reconciling two of the main demands of the Zapatista movement: the recognition of indigenous self-determination and a critical rethinking of prevailing normative gender systems. Hernández Castillo describes how the women in this movement are claiming the right to their own culture, but from an expanded definition of culture, and through their struggle are redefining the concept of multiculturalism from a gendered perspective, thus challenging cultural reductionism and contributing to the national debate about cultural citizenship and collective versus individual rights.

Through a case study in a Tojola'bal community in Chiapas, Margarita Millán Moncayo analyzes the ways in which "Zapatismo" has made an impact on how "Indianness," or indigenous ethnicity, is now understood in Mexico and the ways in which gender has only been partially incorporated into that discussion. Like Hernández Castillo, she notes the two distinct types of rights implied in Zapatista discourse—women's and indigenous—and suggests that the political strategies attached to these two types of rights have not been well integrated. This chapter points to the difficulties that the mobilization of women and the Zapatista discourse of gender equity have created, noting that in many communities they have produced multiple tensions and contradictions. The author argues through a case study in one community that while creating new spaces of participation for young women, the Zapatista movement has also redefined the terms of their subordination to older men and women and to their partners.

Anna María Garza Caligaris and Sonia Toledo Tello's genealogy of women's organizing in Chiapas provides the context out of which the post-Zapatista (after 1994) organizing emerged. They follow the processes in which, during the 1970s and 1980s, Chiapas (as other states in Mexico) was shaken by intense social mobilizations. This chapter dem-

onstrates that women actively participated in peasant and indigenous organizations, even if they were not at that time making claims of their own, and that these experiences were the early part of the political training of many of those who today make up the women's movements in the state. By exploring three key political events of the 1980s, the analysis highlights the tension between the stereotypes of women projected in these key events and the concrete political experiences women feel they gained by participating in them. Emphasizing the continuities between these past organizations and new ones formed in the past decade, the authors illustrate the roots of some of the specific demands and strategies present in contemporary indigenous women's organizing in Chiapas.

We close this section with Maylei Blackwell's chapter, which widens the lens of gender and cultural politics in Chiapas to the transnational arena by tracing the powerful reverberations of women's presence in the EZLN and the formation of the national indigenous women's movement in Mexico. The analysis focuses on how indigenous women, as the most marginalized sector of Mexican society, weave in and between local, national, and transnational scales of power to create new spaces of participation as well as new forms of consciousness, identities, and discourse. Blackwell suggests how indigenous women organizers are effectively using interstitial spaces to create new modes of participation and organizational spaces at the intersections of local, regional, and national politics.

Section Three: Rights and Gender in Ethnographic Context

In this section, we move to the local level in fine-grained case studies of the differential gendered impact of Zapatismo in specific communities. Lynn Stephen's chapter compares indigenous women's political activism in a Zapotec community in Oaxaca with that of the women in a Tojolabal Zapatista community in Chiapas in order to answer the question of what makes the organizing successful in each case. Looking at community-specific gender roles for women in what have often been called "traditional" forms of local governance and at how women's roles in such institutions interact with other forms of organizing at the local level, Stephen suggests that the capacity for indigenous women to be successful in opening up local political systems to their participation and leadership is predicated on the recognition of specific skills and experience they develop in local, ethnic-linked forms of governance—even if such systems formally exclude women. She argues that such capacity is rooted in their ability to connect local gendered contests over political

power and ethnic and cultural rights with regional and national forms of association that offer a different set of gendered political roles and often emphasize a specific ethnic identity or a pan-indigenous form of identity as a basis for organization.

Melissa M. Forbis analyzes how women health promoters (*promotoras*) working in the Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities in Chiapas have begun the process of recuperating traditional medical knowledge as part of a movement toward community self-sufficiency. These *promotoras* characterize themselves as healers who are working collectively and using local natural resources in service to their communities. The valorization of this work by the Autonomous Municipalities has strengthened local indigenous identities through a linkage to "ancestral knowledge" and to local intellectual property rights. In describing the personal consequences of their mobilizations and how this work has opened up other spaces for women's organizing, Forbis argues that this work has enabled women to confront and renegotiate gender and ethnic relations within their families, their communities, and beyond.

Shannon Speed considers the recent organizing of women in one community, where a conflict between women's groups reflects larger dynamics of reemergent ethnic identifications, newly voiced gender demands, and ultimately the contentious issue of collective versus individual rights. Speed argues that indigenous women—in their insistence on struggling simultaneously for their communities' collective right to define themselves and determine their own futures and for change within the community to meet their gender demands as individual women—are rendering an individual rights/collective rights dichotomy irrelevant. She further suggests that by refusing to separate out the various aspects of their experience as human beings and members of a community into the conceptual categories of liberal legal thought (individual vs. collective rights), these women are also challenging the precepts that underpin the logic of the neoliberal state in Mexico.

Section Three closes with Violeta Zylberberg Panebiano's exploration, through a case study of a Tzeltal community in the Lacandon rain forest, of some of the challenges that Zapatista communities have faced in their attempts to eliminate gender inequality. Since the introduction of the Women's Revolutionary Law in the community in 1994, some community norms have changed. Zylberberg Panebiano describes, for example, how domestic violence has decreased but has not vanished as some women are still afraid of male retaliation. One of the most significant changes in the community has been to raise the age of marriage from

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fourteen to sixteen years of age to twenty or older. Younger women are now choosing their own spouses and even have access to birth control pills. Such changes are significant, but they exist in an overall context in which women often have to continue to fight for their rights both in their community and in the larger region they live in.

Taken together, these chapters bring historical and ethnographic depth to the processes of social construction and social change that characterize the situation of indigenous women in Chiapas today. Mapping both the ways in which indigenous women's dissident discourses and actions can disrupt, challenge, and potentially transform oppressive power relations and the manner in which power relations become reconfigured and reinscribed in new forms, the volume highlights indigenous women's agency in creating their own futures in complex and contradictory terrain. Because we agree with Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003:33) that "it is only by understanding the contradictions inherent in women's location within various structures that effective political action and challenges can be devised," we offer this mapping of women's multiple locations to provide critical understandings toward more effective political action and greater social justice.

NOTES

1. The word *pueblos* in Spanish has multiple meanings: indigenous nations, indigenous peoples, or specific indigenous communities. In this discourse, it refers to indigenous peoples.

2. Charles R. Hale (2004:3) has deemed this view "dangerously sanguine" because it seriously underestimates the extent to which these collective actions have already been *acted upon*, yielding political spaces that are at once empowering and constrained.

3. Since the Zapatista uprising, a number of books have been published that address political organizing by indigenous women. See Eber and Kovic 2003; Hernández Castillo 1998b; Lovera and Palomo 1997; Nash 2001; Rovira 1994; Stephen 2002.

4. *Propuestas de las mujeres indígenas al Congreso Nacional Indígena (Proposals from Indigenous Women to the National Indigenous Congress)*. From the seminar "Reformas al Artículo 4to. Constitucional" (Reforms to Article 4 of the Constitution), October 8–12, 1996, Mexico City.

5. For a historical perspective of indigenous normative systems, see, for San Pedro Chenalhó, Garza Caligaris and Toledo 2002; for San Juan Chamula, Rus 1990; for New Guinea, Fitzpatrick 1980; and for Africa, Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; and Cooper and Stoler 1989.

6. The extent to which women have been included in Zapatista communities has depended on the type of preexisting local power structure, the level of organization and political consciousness that women had before Zapatismo, and the political history of the communities. For other experiences, see Eber 2001; Hernández Castillo and Zylberberg 2001; Olivera 2004.

7. The various proposals and concrete experiences in indigenous autonomy are addressed in Díaz Polanco 1997; Rus, Hernández Castillo, and Mattiace 2003.

BETWEEN FEMINIST
ETHNOCENTRICITY
AND ETHNIC ESSENTIALISM

*The Zapatistas' Demands and the
National Indigenous Women's Movement*

R. AÍDA HERNÁNDEZ CASTILLO

*I've had enough
I'm sick of seeing and touching
Both sides of things
Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody*

*Nobody
Can talk to anybody
Without me*

Right?

*I explain my mother to my father my father to my little sister
My little sister to my brother my brother to the white feminists
The white feminists to the Black church folks the Black church folks
To the ex-hippies the ex-hippies to the Black separatists the
Black separatists to the artists the artists to my friends' parents . . .*

*Then I've got to explain myself
To everybody
I do more translating
Than the Gaudamn U.N.*

KATE RUSHIN, FROM THE BRIDGE POEM

Kate Rushin's poem refers to the frustrations and difficulties of many black feminists during the 1970s in the United States. It tells of being a "bridge" between several struggles, of having to "explain" to the black movement the importance of feminist demands and to the feminist movement the relevance of the fight against racism. Speaking at a

university forum, Candida Jiménez, Mixe leader of the National Council of Indigenous Women (Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas, CNMI), and Alma López, Quiché member of the municipal government of Quetzaltenango, described experiences similar to Rushin's. They have fought to bridge the gap between an indigenous movement that refuses to acknowledge its sexism and a feminist movement that cannot see its own ethnocentricity.¹ The testimonies of these women are a wake-up call to urban feminists about the need to construct a feminism of diversity (*feminismo de la diversidad*) that recognizes the different ways in which Mexican women imagine their gender identities and conceive their strategies in the struggle. This chapter analyzes how the incipient national movement of indigenous women is affecting feminist, indigenous, and nationalist discourses.

One group of women, still a minority, began to be heard after the Zapatista uprising on January 1, 1994. From many different parts of the country and with diverse organizational histories, these women presented a political agenda that combined specific gender demands with demands for the autonomy of their peoples. It has been a fight on many fronts. On one side, organized indigenous women have joined with the national indigenous movement in their protest against the economic oppression and racism that disadvantages indigenous peoples. In parallel, these women are developing their own political discourse and practice from a culturally situated gender perspective that questions equally the sexism and essentialism of indigenous organizations and the ethnocentricity of hegemonic feminism.

An analysis of their demands and strategies points to the emergence of a new kind of indigenous feminism. Although it may coincide in some respects with the demands of some sectors of the national feminist movement, there are substantial differences. The economic and cultural context in which indigenous women have constructed their gender identities marks the specific forms taken by their struggles, their concepts of women's dignity, and their ways of forming political alliances. Ethnic, gender, and class identities have determined the strategies of these women; they have opted for incorporating themselves into the broadest struggles of their peoples while creating specific spaces for reflection on their experiences of exclusion on the grounds of sex and ethnicity.

BACKGROUND

Although the Zapatista movement was a catalyst for indigenous women and made their demands more visible, their newfound activism must be seen from the perspective of the indigenous and peasant struggles of the past two decades.

Beginning mainly in the 1970s, there emerged an important indigenous movement that questioned the official ideology that Mexico is a homogeneous mestizo nation. Hand in hand with demands for land came cultural and political demands, which would evolve into the struggle for autonomy of the indigenous peoples. During this time, there were important changes in the domestic economy, and new spaces emerged for collective reflection, of which indigenous women were a part.

In the case of Chiapas, the so-called Indigenous Congress (Congreso Indígena) of 1974, in which Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Chol, and Tojolabal people took part, is considered a watershed in the history of indigenous peoples. Dating from this congress peasant demands for fairer distribution of land were accompanied by cultural demands. Though academic studies of the period make no mention of the participation of women, we know from firsthand accounts that women took charge of the logistics of many of the marches, sit-downs, and meetings that these studies document.² This role of "accompaniment" continued to exclude indigenous women from decision making and active participation in their organizations, but it did permit them to gather and share their experiences with other indigenous women from different regions of the state.

Alongside women's active participation in peasant movements, changes in the Mexican domestic economy were bringing larger numbers of women into the informal economy through the sale of agricultural and handcrafted products at local markets. At the same time, the "oil boom" combined with the scarcity of cultivable lands caused many men from the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Tabasco, and Veracruz to migrate to the oil fields, leaving their wives in charge of the family economy.³ This monetarization of the indigenous economy has been seen as a factor that takes power away from women within the family, as their domestic work becomes less indispensable for the reproduction of the workforce. According to this perspective, as wage work became more readily available, cash-based transactions between people began to replace exchanges of services and obligations, and purchased foods and commodities began to replace those grown and made at home, such as corn tortillas, by indigenous women (Collier 1994; Flood 1994). However, for many women, the process has been exactly the opposite: their

position within the family has been restructured, but their involvement with informal commerce has led to increased contact with other indigenous and mestizo women and to the organization of cooperatives that later became spaces for collective reflection (Nash 1993).

The Catholic Church, through priests and nuns linked to liberation theology, also played an important part in the promotion of these spaces of reflection, above all in the areas of influence of the San Cristóbal (Chiapas), Oaxaca and Tehuantepec (Oaxaca), and Tlapa (Guerrero) dioceses. Although liberation theology does not promote reflection on gender issues, its courses and workshops, which analyze the social inequality and racism of mestizo society, have led indigenous women to also question the inequalities of gender in their own communities. The workshops also provided many women with their first experiences with public speaking and in some cases taught indigenous women how to read and write in Spanish.

In Chiapas at the end of the 1980s a group of nuns together with lay religious activists began to support this line of questioning, pointing to the need to establish a women's area in the diocese of San Cristóbal. Elsewhere I have analyzed in detail this encounter between religious and indigenous women, which resulted in the creation of the Diocesan Council of Women (Coordinadora Diocesana de Mujeres, CODIMUJ), a principal organization of Chiapanecan indigenous women (see Hernández Castillo 1998b, 2004; Gil 1991). These women have had an important role in the wider women's movement. At the same time, feminist nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) began working in rural areas, combining their support for indigenous women's economic participation with the promotion of gender consciousness.

I am a member of this generation that developed its feminism through dialogue with indigenous and peasant women in various regions of the country. Many of us had participated in leftist movements, in solidarity with national liberation struggles in Central America or in political organizations working with popular and peasant sectors in Mexico. Based on the lessons we learned with rural women, we felt the feminist agenda should be closely linked to a process of reflecting on the economic and social inequalities that defined their lives. The history of Mexican feminism has been characterized by the tension between those who have placed the legalization of abortion at the center of their feminist struggle and those who have insisted that a feminist agenda should focus on transforming gender and class inequalities. This has been one of the many challenges we have confronted in constructing a national feminist movement.

With the creation of the Feminist Women's Coalition (*Coalición de Mujeres Feministas*) in 1976 and then the National Front for the Liberation and Rights of Women (*Frente Nacional por la Liberación y los Derechos de las Mujeres*, FNALIDM) in 1979, the legalization of abortion and the fight against domestic violence were the two demands that united hegemonic feminism in Mexico. This feminism—fundamentally urban, theorized from an academic perspective, and constructed in central Mexico—has maintained its hegemony vis-à-vis other popular and rural feminisms, whose ideas have not been heard at major international feminist events. The political practices of these other feminisms have been developed outside the influence of international funding agencies, and their history has yet to be written.⁴

To date histories of Mexican feminism written by academics (Lamas 1992, 1994; González 2001; Lau 2002; Bartra 2002) continue to use the term “popular feminisms” to refer to NGOs that, beginning in the 1980s, supported organizing among poor urban and rural women but not to refer to women from the popular sectors who developed their own critical posture with regard to gender inequalities. The latter are represented as passive women who are in need of “consciousness-raising” by feminists, and their actions are described as corresponding exclusively to practical demands.⁵ Gisela Espinosa Damián (2005:85), who has witnessed and participated in the construction of this feminism from the bottom up states the following in this regard: “The appellation ‘popular feminism’ should not be applied to civil organizations, since women from poor urban neighborhoods were those who coined this term and assumed this identity.” She proposes differentiating between civil feminism, composed of civil organizations with members who are generally middle-class professionals who work with popular sectors, and popular feminism, which she would use to refer to “processes led by women from popular sectors who are the key players, and who create their own organizations, but also participate in mixed organizations and combine the struggle to transform gender inequalities and to work toward a more favorable position for women with other types of demands” (Espinosa Damián 2005:87).

Indigenous and peasant women have joined with women from the popular sectors in a number of historic events, such as the First National Women's Conference (*Primer Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres*), held in 1980 and attended by, for example, indigenous women from Chiapas belonging to the Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization (*Organización Campesina “Emiliano Zapata,” OCEZ*).⁶ However, indigenous women's

movements in Chiapas have followed their own courses, independent of urban popular feminisms in central Mexico.

In Chiapas, it was in the context of the peasant movement during the 1980s that indigenous women from various regions came together in conferences, workshops, and congresses. Independently from the official agendas of those events, which were focused on agrarian problems, these women began to share experiences and reflect on their lives. Inequalities within the family, community, and political organizations became the topic of conversation in the hallways during these meetings. As advisers to organizations, pastoral agents linked to liberation theology, and academics with a social commitment, we not only witnessed and participated in this dialogue, we also constructed our own feminist agenda, expanding on the criticisms pointing to the inequality of the "capitalist system" and reflecting on gender exclusion and racism.

An important event that defined this meeting point between civil feminism in a process of construction and an indigenous women's movement was the First Conference of Indigenous and Peasant Women of Chiapas (*Primer Encuentro de Mujeres Indígenas y Campesinas de Chiapas*), held in San Cristóbal de las Casas in 1986 and organized by academics and activists at the Autonomous University of Chiapas (*Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, UNACH*) and the Organization of Indigenous Healers of the State of Chiapas (*Organización de Médicos Indígenas del Estado de Chiapas, OMIECH*). Sonia Toledo and Anna María Garza Caligaris, who promoted this event, explain the way in which methodologies from popular education were used to explore together with indigenous women their own conceptions of women's bodies, sexuality, and suffering (Garza Caligaris and Toledo 2005). They state:

The idea was to build relations different from those characterizing organizations traditionally dominated by men. Even though we have inherited and re-created the distinction between those giving and those receiving advice, and even though certain tensions and conflicts were also generated, this type of encounter makes it possible to create new dynamics for reflection and coexistence. Value was placed on political work and participation by women; emphasis was placed on the expression of emotions and on personal self-esteem. (213)

Despite the structural inequalities separating professional women from indigenous women, these dialogues defined the organizational processes and political agendas of both sectors.

Emerging from these dialogues were various feminist associations that chose to devote themselves to organizing and assisting indigenous and peasant women. I developed my position as a feminist within the framework of one of these organizations, the Women's Group of San Cristóbal de las Casas (Grupo de Mujeres de San Cristóbal de las Casas), founded in 1989 (and renamed COLEM in 1994) after a series of rapes in 1988 and 1989 of NGO women. We initially organized as a broad-based front against sexual and domestic violence. Over time our work expanded into the educational, legal, and health realms, including workshops for promoting gender awareness.⁷ Similar experiences took place in other indigenous regions in the country, as in the case of Comaletzin, founded in 1987, whose members promoted development based on a gender perspective with indigenous groups and peasants in the states of Morelos, Puebla, Sonora and Chiapas;⁸ the Center for Research and Action for Women (Centro de Investigación y Acción para la Mujer, CIAM), founded in 1989 to support organizing among indigenous women in the Altos region of Chiapas and Guatemalan refugee women;⁹ Women for Dialogue (Mujeres por el Diálogo), which worked in the states of Veracruz and Oaxaca; and advisers from the Women's Solidarity Action Team (Equipo de Mujeres en Acción Solidaria) who worked with Purepecha women in Michoacán.¹⁰

Discourses centering on women's dignity promoted by the Catholic Church began to be supplanted by a discourse centering on women's rights and by new views on gender. Indigenous women appropriated and reinterpreted these ideas from their dialogues with feminists.¹¹

Migration, organizing, religious groups, feminist NGOs, and even official development programs have all influenced how indigenous men and women have restructured their relations within the family and reworked their strategies. But it was the Zapatista National Liberation Army (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) that first provided a public forum for indigenous women.¹²

Under the influence of the Zapatistas, a movement of national dimensions has emerged for the first time in Mexico—still embryonic and full of contradictions—in which the various local forces are arguing for the incorporation of gender demands into the political agenda of the indigenous movement. In 1997, at the National Encounter of Indigenous Women "Building Our History" (Construyendo Nuestra Historia), the National Council of Indigenous Women was founded (see chapter 4, this volume). This organization has been vital to the promotion of a gendered perspective within the national indigenous movement. The voices

of many of its members have been raised in the National Indigenous Congress (Congreso Nacional Indígena, CNI) and in the national debate on the Law of Indigenous Rights and Culture (Ley de Derecho y Cultura Indígena), questioning static representations of tradition and recovering the right to “cambiar permaneciendo y permanecer cambiando” (to change while remaining and to remain changing).

UP AGAINST FEMINIST ETHNOCENTRICITY AND ETHNIC ESSENTIALISM

Indigenous women have linked their gender struggles to the struggle for the autonomy of their peoples—hence their desire to continue as part of the National Indigenous Congress, the main organization of indigenous peoples of Mexico that was established to support the Zapatistas’ demands. Nevertheless, this policy has faced considerable resistance, as much from the feminist movement as from the indigenous movement. In our view, both movements have benefited from this double activism: different kinds of feminists have been stimulated to incorporate cultural and ethnic diversity into their analysis of gender inequality, and the indigenous movement has had to incorporate gender into their perspectives on the ethnic and class discrimination against their peoples.

Mexican academic feminism, mainly through the work of anthropologists in the 1980s, had already modified its definition of gender to include the diverse contexts in which it is constructed. It was recognized that “asymmetry between men and women signifies different things in different places. Hence the position, activities, limitations and possibilities of women vary from culture to culture” (Lamas 1986:184). However, this recognition did not lead to an inclusive feminist agenda that would meet the specific needs of indigenous women. The hegemonic feminist agenda has focused on demands for voluntary maternity, recognition of reproductive rights, and the struggle against sexual and domestic violence (Lamas 1992; González 2001; Lau 2002; Bartra 2002; Tuñón 1997; Marcos 1999). While it is true that indigenous women voice many of these demands, in their case they are always accompanied by economic and cultural demands, products of the racism and exploitation that have configured their gender identities. In this sense we can apply to Mexican hegemonic feminism’s ethnocentricity the same criticism that Judith Butler (2001:9) leveled at North American academic feminism’s homophobia: “Any feminist theory that restricts the meaning of

gender to the presuppositions of its own practice establishes exclusive gender norms in the bosom of feminism, usually with homophobic consequences." In our case, the consequences are ethnocentric.

Even those of us who have been working with indigenous women in rural areas since the 1980s have been doing so from the basis of our own feminist agendas and out of definitions of gender and self-esteem that arise from our own experiences. Projects for popular education and co-participative investigation popularized in South America by Paulo Freire influenced our methodologies in working with rural women.¹³ Although this model of investigation and education proposed to "democratize" the hierarchical relationship of the investigator and the investigated, the educator and the educated, the theoretical-political premise inherited from Marxism that the intellectual can awaken the consciousness of the "oppressed" assumed a paternalistic view of the popular sectors. When we met in workshops with indigenous women during the 1980s, this was a legacy that we found ourselves reproducing and gradually confronting. Inherent in the idea that our feminist mandate consisted of "raising the awareness" of indigenous women was the perspective that a "false consciousness" existed that had to be confronted. Processes of self-evaluation and reformulation of methodologies began to be developed during the 1990s, and constructive dialogue with organized indigenous women has been essential throughout.¹⁴

Feminist anthropology in Mexico has also been developing a line of analysis that tries to reach problems specific to indigenous women. Beginning mainly in the 1970s, feminism joined forces with anthropology in the study of the indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica. The oppression of indigenous women was studied from two perspectives: one that emphasized the importance of the patriarchy as a system of inequality that furthered the "universal oppression of the woman" (Chiñas 1975; Dalton and Musalem 1992) and one that, under the influence of Marxism, focused on the impact of capitalist development and modernization on gender relations among indigenous peoples. It is this second, political economy line of analysis that has had more influence on feminist ethnographies of Mesoamerica. Among these are studies on Mazahua and Otomí women by Lourdes Arizpe (1980), on Mam women by Laurel Bossen (1983) and Tracy Ehler (1990), and on Tzotzil women by Mercedes Olivera Bustamante (1979), June Nash (1993), and Merielle Flood (1994). The main argument was that the introduction of capitalist relations among indigenous peoples had transformed gender relations, substituting the complementary roles characteristic of self-sufficient

economies for less equal relationships. According to these perspectives, in the new economic context women lose autonomy through increased dependence on their husbands' wages or through being placed in a more marginal position in the capitalist economy. Although some of these perspectives recognize possibilities for resistance against the powerful forces of capital (Eber 1995; Nash 1993; Rosenbaum 1993; Stephen 1991), the social agency of indigenous women almost disappears in the face of the emphasis on the structures of domination that mark their lives.

In spite of the efforts of feminist anthropology to create a space where indigenous women could speak out, for decades its representations portrayed them as passive subjects, victims of patriarchy or the forces of capitalism. Not until 1994 have representations of indigenous women as political actors and constructors of their own history begun to appear in Mexican social science.¹⁵ In this theoretical reformulation of the concept of gender as a multidimensional category and in the recognition of the importance of ethnic and class issues in understanding identity processes in multicultural Mexico, input from indigenous women has been fundamental. Their voices can be heard in documents emanating from their encounters, workshops, and congresses and in statements and interviews that have been published in feminist periodicals and in the national press.¹⁶

In parallel with this dialogue with feminism, indigenous women have maintained an exchange with the national indigenous movement of which they are an active part through their participation in the CNI. There they have had to confront the idyllic visions of indigenous culture that permeate the political discourse of many CNI members, many indigenous leaders, and many of their advisers.

Although we can understand that during certain phases in the development of social movements a discourse that essentializes "lo propio" (what is ours) and excludes the "other," as in some sectors of the radical Afro-American movement in the United States or in the initial radical segregationism of the feminist movement, may emerge, experience has taught us that such strategies only bring isolation and cancel the possibilities for forging political alliances. On many occasions indigenous women have opted to vindicate the historic and malleable character of their cultures and to condemn those "uses and customs" that offend their dignity. It is a battle on two fronts: claiming from the state the right to cultural differences and fighting within their communities to change the traditions that they see as infringements of their rights. Their struggle is not one for the recognition of an essentialized culture but for the right to reconstruct, confront, and reproduce that culture, not on

terms established by the state but on terms established by the indigenous peoples themselves in the context of their own internal plurality.

FROM "FEMINISM" TO FEMINISMS

Although the construction of more egalitarian relationships between women and men has become a central point in the struggle of organized indigenous women, the concept of feminism has not been appropriated in their political discourse. This concept continues to be identified with urban liberal feminism, which for many of them carries separatist connotations that do not fit with their ideas of the need to join with their male indigenous comrades.

Those of us who arrived at feminism through the experience of militant leftist groups know the ideological force of discourses that represent feminism as a bourgeois ideology, divisionist and individualist, that separates women from the struggles of their peoples. The experiences of Anglo-Saxon liberal feminism, which in fact arose from an individualistic view of "citizens' rights," have been used to create a homogeneous representation of feminism.¹⁷ Appropriating this concept and giving it new meanings has been the struggle of the various Mexican feminisms that have been growing up in recent decades. An "indigenous feminism" will be possible only insofar as indigenous women give their own content to the concept of feminism and find it useful in creating alliances with other organized women.

At present, many of their demands—both those directed at the state and those directed at their organizations and communities—continue to center on recovering the dignity of women and on the construction of a more just life for all men and women. The Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Law (*Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres*) is one of the many documents that express these new gender demands. (See chapter 2, this volume.) Although all indigenous women do not know this law in detail, it has become a symbol of the possibility of a better life.

These new gender demands have been expressed in different forms in workshops, forums, and congresses organized since 1994, and question equally the essentialist perspectives of the indigenous movement and feminism's generalizing discourses—which emphasize the right to equality without considering the way in which class and ethnicity mark the identities of indigenous women.

At the forefront of the indigenous movement, these new voices have struggled for the recognition and elimination of the inequalities that

characterize gender relations within their communities and organizations. At the same time, they have revealed the dichotomy between tradition and modernity that is reproduced by the official indigenous movement—and to a certain degree the autonomy movement as well—according to which there are only two options: stand by tradition or embrace modernity. Indigenous women claim their right to cultural difference while demanding the right to change those traditions that oppress or exclude them. “We must also think about what needs to be made new in our customs. The law should protect and promote only the modes and customs that women, communities, and organizations agree are good to have. The customs we have should not hurt anyone.”¹⁸

Indigenous women are also questioning the universal concept “Woman” promoted in some urban feminist discourses. Here their voices echo the criticisms of women of color against North American radical and liberal feminism in presenting a homogenizing vision of women without recognizing that gender is constructed in different ways in different historical contexts.¹⁹

The assertion of a culturally situated analysis of gender has been central for the CNMI (see chapter 4, this volume), among whose objectives are the following: “Strengthen the leadership of indigenous women from a gender perspective based in our cultural identity. Establish a network of communication at a national level among indigenous women. Train indigenous women at a national level. Raise the consciousnesses of indigenous peoples and national society regarding respect for the human rights of indigenous women, including a vision of gender. With regard to training, methodologies appropriate to identity and gender will be used according to our worldview.”²⁰ This is evidently a feminist platform that questions the hegemonic definitions of the term “feminism.”

THE CULTURE GAP BETWEEN INDIGENOUS AND NONINDIGENOUS WOMEN

The lack of cultural sensitivity in the face of specific problems and worldviews has often hindered dialogue between urban feminists and indigenous women. The temptation to assume that we are united through the common experience of patriarchy is always present. It is this lack of recognition, in part, that has impeded the construction of an inclusive national feminist movement.

One example of the failed attempts to form a broad movement is the September 1994 State Convention of Chiapanecan Women (Convención

Estatal de Mujeres Chiapanecas). Prior to the National Democratic Convention (Convención Nacional Democrática) convened by the EZLN, women from NGOs, cooperatives, and peasant organizations gathered to write a document to be presented at the convention enumerating the specific demands of the women of Chiapas. This was the seed of the State Convention of Chiapanecan Women, a politically and ideologically heterogeneous cultural space. Urban women from NGOs and feminists and nonfeminists from ecclesiastical base communities (comunidades eclesiales de base, CEBs) met with monolingual women from the highlands, principally Tzeltal and Tzotzil; with Tojolabal, Chol, and Tzeltal women from the jungle region; and with Mam indigenous women from the Sierra. The convention was short-lived; only three ordinary meetings and one special meeting took place before its dissolution. A historical reconstruction of this broad movement that would analyze the strategies of urban feminism to create bridges of communication with indigenous women remains to be done. However, it is noteworthy that mestizo women, though a minority, assumed positions of leadership in an internal hierarchy that was not openly recognized.

Many members of the convention were later invited by the EZLN to advise or participate in a panel on indigenous culture and rights formed in 1995 in San Cristóbal de las Casas, within which a special panel was set up titled "Situation, Rights and Culture of the Indigenous Woman." In this panel, the nonindigenous women organizers in charge of reporting the findings omitted detailed descriptions by indigenous women of their day-to-day problems, instead including only their general demands for demilitarization and their criticisms of neoliberalism. It is through these daily experiences, erased from the records of encounters, that indigenous women have constructed their gender identities in a manner different from urban feminists, and it is only through these experiences that we can understand the specificity of their demands and their struggles.

It is not surprising, then, that when in October 1997 the First National Congress of Indigenous Women (Primer Congreso Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas) was held, the members decided that nonindigenous women present could participate only as observers. This decision was called separatist and even racist by some feminists who found themselves silenced for the first time by indigenous women. Their arguments are similar to those used against women when we demand our own space within political organizations.

Despite our best intentions, it is usually the case that nonindigenous women, who have a superior command of Spanish and the written word, dominate discussions when sharing space with indigenous women. For

this reason, it is essential to respect the creation of separate spaces and to wait for the best time to form alliances. Purépecha, Totonaca, Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Mazateca, Cucateca, Otomí, Triquí, Nahuá, Zapoteca, Zoque, Chol, Tlapaneca, Mam, Chatina, Popoluca, Amuzga, and Mazahua women who gathered in Oaxaca at that first national meeting of indigenous women are undergoing their own processes of change that do not always obey the times and agendas of urban feminists.

An example of the cultural breach between urban mestizos and the indigenous is found in the harsh criticism by some feminists of the Second Women's Revolutionary Law (*Segunda Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres*) proposed by the Zapatistas because it included an article prohibiting adultery (see Rojas 1996). This modification of the First Women's Revolutionary Law (*Primera Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres*) was considered a conservative measure resulting from the influence of the church over indigenous communities. Critics should instead see the indigenous women's demand as a protest against the cultural justification of male infidelity and bigamy, which is closely linked to domestic violence. A prohibition that may seem moralistic and retrograde to urban women is perhaps for many indigenous women a way of rejecting a "tradition" that makes them vulnerable within both family and community.

Another example is legislation on domestic violence. For several years, urban feminists in Chiapas fought for harsher penalties against wife-batterers, with eventual success in the modification in 1998 of Article 122 of the penal code. For indigenous women who are financially independent, the harsher penalties mean considerable hardship. The case of alimony and child support is similar: as long as their husbands are without lands and steady work, indigenous women will not be helped by legislated penalties.

The words of Chandra Mohanty (1991:67) are valuable with regard to domestic violence in multicultural contexts: "Masculine violence must be interpreted within specific societies so as to understand it better and organize ourselves more effectively to fight it." If recognition of the similarities among women allows us to form political alliances, recognition of our differences is vital in the construction of a respectful dialogue and in the search for strategies more in keeping with differing cultural realities.

This attempt to reformulate feminism in the context of indigenous culture has advanced more from the other side. The Quiché councilor Alma López described these new concepts:

As an indigenous feminist, I try to recover the philosophical principles of my culture and ground them in the realities of the twenty-first century.

That means I criticize what I don't like about my culture while proudly accepting that I belong to it. Indigenous feminism for me grows from a principle: women are working toward the objective of constructing ourselves as independent people formed in community, people who can give to others without forgetting about themselves. The philosophical principles that I would recover from my culture are equality, the complementarity between men and women, between women and women, and between men and men. At present, this famous complementarity of the Mayan culture does not exist; to claim the opposite is an aggression. It exists only in history. Currently, we have total inequality. But complementarity and equality can be built.

I would also recover the idea of the double vision, the *cabawil*; he who at the same time sees forward and backward, who sees one side and the other, sees black and sees white. Recovering this ideal in terms of women means recognizing all that is sad and terrible forming my reality as a woman, and rebuilding myself with all the good that I have. It means recognizing that there are women different from me, indigenous and *ladina*, black, urban and peasant women.²¹

Perhaps the building of this respectful and constructive intercultural dialogue will contribute to the formation of a new indigenous feminism based on respect for difference and rejection of inequality.

NOTES

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1. Both leaders participated in the Foro Interdisciplinario de Estudios de Género (Interdisciplinary Forum on Gender Studies), which took place at the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (National School of Anthropology and History) in April 2001.

2. Although some feminists have tried to note the participation of women in these movements in nonacademic publications, academic works published to date silence the voices of indigenous women. For example, on the peasant and indige-

nous movement at the national level, see Mejía and Sarmiento 1987; and on the indigenous movement in Chiapas in the 1970s, see Morales Bermúdez 1992.

3. For an analysis of the impact of these changes on the peasant economy, see Collier 1994; Rus 1990.

4. There is some pioneering work on the history of popular urban feminism and its links to civil feminism (e.g., Alejandra Massolo 1991; Espinoza and Paz Paredes 1992; Espinoza Damián 1993). However, the history of rural and indigenous feminism is still in the process of systematization through a number of doctoral dissertations (see Espinoza Damián 2005; Mejía 2005) and research projects in progress (see, e.g., advances from the project "Viejos y nuevos espacios de poder: Mujeres indígenas, resistencia cotidiana y organización colectiva" under the section "Proyectos Especiales" at www.ciesas.edu.mx).

5. These representations of women from the popular sectors in the histories of Mexican feminism appear to reproduce a rather hegemonic tendency in the literature on social movements. They establish typologies that implicitly hierarchize these movements, from lesser to greater potential for emancipation, and they tend to reify the dichotomy between material demands and cultural demands as mutually exclusive. The organizing experiences we present in this book reveal the limitations of perspectives in which the utopian values and horizons of the analyst are used as universal parameters for measuring social actors' capacities for transformation. The closer the political agenda of these perspectives is to that of the analyst, the greater the potential for transgression, leading to ethnocentric representations of social movements in Latin America. Alan Touraine (1987), for example, stated that there were no social movements in Latin America, since collective actions around economic needs lacked a sense of *historicity* that would make for a more comprehensive political project.

Feminist analyses have not been exempt from this "political evolutionism" in their typification of women's movements in Latin America, and the clearest example is the so-called paradigm of interests popularized through the works of Maxine Molyneux (1985, 2003). This paradigm once again proposes a division between poor women who mobilize around practical interests and feminist women who mobilize around strategic interests. *Practical interests* are defined as those based on the satisfaction of needs emerging from women's position within the gender-based division of labor; *strategic interests*, as those involving demands for transforming unequal gender relations. Here, strategic interests are the only interests considered intrinsically political in nature and potentially transforming. Similarly, Sheila Rowbotham (1992) differentiates between "women in movement," referring to those women who work together to achieve common objectives, and limited the use of the concept "women's movement" to refer to those making gender demands of a feminist nature.

These dichotomous typifications have been seriously questioned by other feminist perspectives (Álvarez 1990; Kaber 1992; Stephen 1997; Wieringa 1994; Hernández Castillo forthcoming), which have pointed out that these visions underestimate the critical contributions that organized poor women, in this case indigenous women, can make to the destabilization of the social order

by failing to discuss how, within the framework of their strategies for survival, these women negotiate power and reconstruct their collective identities.

6. This event is considered to have been a turning point in the history of popular feminism and was organized by groups linked to liberation theology and feminist civil associations such as *Comunicación, Intercambio y Desarrollo Humano en América Latina (CIDHAL)*. Approximately five hundred women from both the urban and rural sectors attended, and one of their objectives was to discuss the role and problems of women in popular movements.

7. For a history of this organization, see Freyermuth and Fernández 1995; and for a self-critical reflection on my own experiences in this organization and the work with indigenous women, see Hernández Castillo forthcoming.

8. Comaletzin was officially constituted in 1987. Its principal lines of action are "training, organization, education, and investigation, with gender as a focus of analysis" (Comaletzin manifesto, 1999). This organization played an important role in the formation of the National Network of Rural Advocates and Advisors (*Red Nacional de Asesoras y Promotoras Rurales*) in 1987 by organizations concerned with gender and development issues in various rural areas of Mexico.

9. CIAM was founded in 1989 by Gloria Sierra, Begoña de Agustín, Pilar Jaime, and Mercedes Olivera, with members in Nicaragua, Mexico, and Guatemala. The initial objective was to work with women displaced by armed conflict (refugees, the displaced, and the returned) in Central America and Mexico and, through socially committed research, help them to develop gender identity and consciousness, stand up for their rights as refugee women, and defend those rights in UNHCR, in their own refugee organizations, and in their countries of refuge. They worked principally with organized women in popular movements; exiles in Mexico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras, Belize, and Panama; and displaced women in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. (Thanks to Mercedes Olivera for this information.) These experiences were preceded by various efforts to promote reflection on women's rights within peasant organizations such as the Independent Confederation of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (*Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos, CIOAC*) and the Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization (*OCEZ-CNPA*). For an account of these initial efforts in the early 1980s, see Garza Caligaris and Toledo 2004.

10. The Women's Solidarity Action Team (*Equipo de Mujeres en Acción Solidaria*) was founded in February 1985. It defined its areas of work as health and popular education with popular sectors in Mexico City and with indigenous women in various parts of the country.

11. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the work of feminist organizations in rural areas. Many others have followed these pioneer organizations and have established constructive dialogues with indigenous women. An important example is the work of K'inál Antzetik with the women of the CNMI and that of many other feminist organizations belonging to the National Network of Rural Advisors and Advocates.

12. This public participation has been answered with repression both from the state and from their own communities and partners. For an analysis of the

violence confronting organized women, see Hernández Castillo (1998b). For an analysis of other problems facing indigenous women in their attempts to organize, see Magallón 1988.

13. Co-participative investigation and the projects of popular education developed in the late 1970s and the 1980s in rural Mexico stem from a reworking of Freire's investigative model. Considered by many to be Latin America's contribution to world social science, co-participative investigation, also known as action-investigation, became popular as a methodology that sought to further science that was committed to the popular sectors. In 1977 investigators from five continents formed the Participative Investigation Network (Red de Investigación Participativa), headed by the Latin Americans Fals Borda, Francisco Vio Grossi, and Carlos Rodríguez Brandao.

14. A critical reflection on the relation between mestizo counselors and indigenous peasants during the 1980s may be found in Garza Caligaris and Toledo 2004. I have taken part in self-evaluation of feminist methodologies with colleagues in Comalertzin and COLEM. These lines of reflection have also been developed in Latin American feminist encounters; see the contents of the Taller sobre Feminismo y Diversidad Cultural (Workshop on Feminism and Cultural Diversity), organized by Sylvia Marcos in the VIII Congreso Latinoamericano y del Caribe, in Marcos 1999a.

15. For the point of view of journalists, see Lovera and Palomo 1999; Rojas 1994; Rovira 1997; Marcos 1997; and various issues of the periodical *Cuadernos Feministas*, 1997 to the present. For the academic view, see Alberti Manzanares 1997; Bonfil 1997; Garza Caligaris 2002; Hernández Castillo 1994a, 1994b, 1996, 1998a, 1998b; Millán 1996a, 1996b, 1997.

16. A collection of these documents may be found in Lovera and Palomo 1999; see also Sánchez Nestor 2001.

17. Liberal feminism argues that equality for women can be achieved through legal means and social reform and that men as a group need not be challenged. It leans toward an equality of sameness with men and conceives politics in individualistic terms, looking to reform present "liberal" practices in society rather than advocating a radical change. The pro-choice agenda is central in the struggle of liberal feminism using the argument that every individual should have control over his or her own body and that this also affords them the right to make medical decisions. An important theoretician of liberal feminism is Betty Friedman.

18. See "Women's Rights in Our Traditions and Customs" in Section 1 of this volume.

19. For a critique of Western feminism, see Trinh 1988; Alarcón 1990; Mohanty 1991.

20. Document of presentation of the CNMI.

21. Duarte Bastian 2002:27.

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