

The SAGE Handbook of
Identities



Edited by
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Indigeneity as a Field of Power: Multiculturalism and Indigenous Identities in Political Struggles¹

R. Álda Hernández Castillo

Group's self-identification as tribal or indigenous is not natural or inevitable, but neither is it simply invented, adopted, or imposed. It is, rather, a positioning that draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle. (Tania Li)²

Writing this chapter has represented a genuine challenge for me, as I have worked to construct a dialogue between theoretical debates in the 'north' and theoretical and political concerns in the Latin American academic community.³ It has been a labour of translation – both literally and conceptually. Translating debates and placing them in the framework of the political contexts in which they have emerged is fundamental to understanding the relevance of certain analytical perspectives in particular countries, and their lack of relevance in other geopolitical realities. Even the term 'indigeneity,' which I was asked to address for this Handbook, has no literal translation in Spanish. While some authors have chosen to use the Anglicism *indigeneidad* (see Arias, 2006; Canessa, 2006), this term is not commonly used in Latin American social sciences, and does not appear in the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy.⁴

In the Spanish version of this chapter I opted to use the analytical description 'social construction of indigenous identities' to refer to the social, cultural and political processes through which the meaning of being indigenous has been constructed. In line with the argument I will develop here, these processes have involved various dialogues of power with national and global discourses.

In the Latin American context, the historical constructivist perspective of identities has been analytically acknowledged by various scholars of ethnicity and nationalism (Chávez and Hoffman, 2004; Gutiérrez Chong, 2004; Hernández Castillo, 2001; Zarate, 1994), however it has received little attention in debates taking place in the political arena. Political mobilizations in favour of indigenous rights and the alliances between academics and organizations have prioritized other types of debates, such as those focused on indigenous autonomy, multicultural reforms and the tension between the collective rights of peoples and individual rights. The concept of *indigenous* has not been questioned and instead, it has been taken for granted, and from that conceptualization, the political

struggles of those previously referred to as 'native peoples' have been initiated and given momentum.

The political discourses of indigenous organizations with respect to their ancient cultures and their different cultural logics based on a collective sense, have been responded to or criticized more from liberal universalist perspectives, than from post-structuralist perspectives questioning the exclusions implied by these subaltern identities. Part of the challenge faced by those of us who defend the pertinence of a constructivist perspective is that our analytical arguments can be easily used by those opposed to the political demands of indigenous movements. At the same time, for some sectors of the Latin American indigenous movement, the concepts of 'constructed identities' or the 'invention of tradition' could even be offensive, viewed as a critique of the genuine or legitimate nature of their identities (MacLeod, 2008). In the framework of this *cultural climate*⁵ it has been important to clarify that acknowledging the way in which power relations influence our subjectivities and define our collective identities does not signify a denial of the possibilities for building political projects – on the basis of these contradictory consciousnesses – aimed at working toward social justice (Hernández Castillo, 2001).

The political discourses and practices of organized indigenous women have begun to separate the utopian impulse that sometimes characterizes the essentialist representations of indigenous cultures, from the limitations implied in the construction of an alternative national project – when these representations serve as an excuse for not confronting power relations and inequality *among* indigenous peoples (Alvarez C. 2005; Cumes, 2007; Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas, 2003; Gutiérrez and Palomo, 1999; Sánchez, 2005; Velásquez 2003).

In this sense the political concerns of indigenous women are echoed in other voices which, emanating from the black diaspora or transnational migration, have pointed to the

limitations of identity constructions that are based on authenticity discourses, or that deny the possibilities of border identities in which various cultural repertoires converge. In the context of migration to the north and the deterritorialization of thousands of the planet's inhabitants, it becomes politically relevant to discuss the process in which what is *indigenous* is socially constructed, and the way it is linked with community and with territory. This explains why critical reflections of this identity space are more common in this part of the world.

The purpose of this chapter is to build a bridge between various theoretical and political debates around indigenous identities, and this involves crossing national and conceptual borders. It is hoped that these theoretical reflections contribute to a critical re-thinking of some constructions of 'being indigenous' that may lead to new exclusions.

In the sections that follow I will first discuss the origin and the concepts 'indigeneity/indigenous', historicizing the transnational processes of the last five decades through which the concepts have been appropriated to create spaces of political organization in anti-colonial struggles. Second, I will locate these processes in the context of the political debates on multicultural reforms and indigenous rights in Latin America. Third, I will approach the debates on neoliberal multiculturalism, emphasizing the way in which organized indigenous peoples have confronted this new form of governance in the Latin American nation-states. Finally, I will discuss the criticisms of 'indigeneity' that have developed from the study and politics of other subaltern identities: Diaspora and Transnational Studies, Afro Latino and Mestizo Studies and Feminist Studies, to call for a formulation of a more inclusive definition of indigenous identity. To conclude, I suggest that it is our, those of us who from our position in the academic world support the recognition of what are referred to as indigenous rights, political responsibility to listen to the diversity of voices speaking from their identity as indigenous people.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF INDIGENEITY

On 13 September 2007, the United Nations General Assembly approved the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A total of 143 countries voted in favour, 1 country abstained, and the US, Australia, Canada and New Zealand were in opposition. The new UN Declaration signalled the end of a cycle of struggle that began 22 years earlier and involved the active participation and lobbying of indigenous leaders and intellectuals across five continents. The new Declaration has 46 articles, and recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination, control over their lands and natural resources, and the preservation of their culture and traditions.

As with many tools of international law, the Convention's effectiveness will depend on the degree to which indigenous peoples, organizations and social movements appropriate these laws, and whether the existing social fabric has the potential to exert political pressure to achieve their effective enforcement. This Declaration is only the tip of the iceberg, however, in relation to broader political-organizational processes that have transformed the concept of *indigenous* from a legal, analytical term to a concept of self-identification, creating a new collective imaginary and a transnational space (Warren, 1998; Warren K. and Jackson J. (eds), 2002). This has made it possible to share experiences and develop joint strategies, and establish links among groups as different as the Maori of New Zealand, the Adivasi of India and the Mayans of Guatemala.

While indigenous representatives were lobbying at the United Nations, seeking support from member states for the Declaration, the *indigeneity* discourse was travelling along rural roads through the five continents. It reached the most isolated villages through workshops, marches and meetings in which community leaders, NGO members and promoters of liberation theology began to popularize the concept for referring to 'native peoples' and to denounce the effects from

colonialism on their lives and territories. Thus, in addition to local terms of self-identification such as Zapoteco, Mixe, Aymara, Navajo and Evenki, there was a new identitary sense of being *indigenous*. This had the effect of constructing a new *imaginary community* (Anderson, 1983) with other oppressed peoples around the world. Various analysts have pointed out that the movement for indigenous rights was 'born transnational' (Brysk, 2000; Tilley, 2002), since from its very beginnings it extended beyond local struggles and self-identifications.

Unlike the analytical concept of 'ethnic groups,' the concept of 'indigenous' crossed the limited borders of academia and encompassed the formulation of a new political agenda extending beyond the immediate, local problems confronted by the peoples identified with this new concept. The degree to which indigenous people appropriated this new transnational identity depended largely on the organizational processes in each region and on their access to these global discourses. In many regions the local terms of self-identification, such as Quechua, Acateco, Chamula and Popti, continue to be more important than their indigenous identity (Canessa, 2006; Cumes, 2007). In other regions, identities as *campesinos* (peasants) or mestizos continue to be the terms of self-identification used by the population, which viewed from the outside, might be classified as indigenous, due to their linguistic specificity and cultural features. For a variety of historic reasons, however, they have not appropriated this concept (De la Cadena, 2000; Mattiace, 2007).

According to authors who have reconstructed the history of this concept, the word *indigenous* appears in some colonial documents from the fourteenth century, and is defined as 'people bred upon that very soyle [sic]', to distinguish the inhabitants of the Americas from those brought over as slaves by the Spanish and Portuguese (De la Cadena and Starn, 2007). Nevertheless, before the 1950s the concept of *indigenous* was used primarily in botanical works to refer to the native

origin of plants. The term appeared for the first time in an international document in 1957 in Convention 107 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), in reference to the 'Protection and Integration of Indigenous and other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries' (Niezen, 2000). At that time the population referred to in the Convention did not participate in its formulation, and was probably unaware of the significance of the term that was intended to encompass its identities.

If we review academic and political texts from that time period, we find continued reference in world anthropology to 'primitive cultures', and in Latin America, social scientists and the state referred to these human collectives as *campesinos* (peasants). This does not mean there was a lack of cultural identity shared at the community or regional level, or a lack of a particular history transmitted through oral traditions and visions of the world that contrasted with and sometimes confronted western conceptions of the individual and nature. However, this knowledge and these practices were not conceptualized as being 'indigenous', and in most cases the necessary link was not made with the knowledge of other human collectives that had similar colonization experiences.

Thirty years later the development of new communication technologies has created new possibilities for people to imagine themselves as part of the same community, even when they have not met face-to-face. This is what Lyotard (1984) and Harvey (1990) have called *time space compression*. These new technologies have made it possible for native peoples who have experienced colonialism, racism and exclusion to come into contact with others with similar experiences and to build a shared sense of identity as indigenous people.

From this perspective we could say that the practices, institutions and artistic production of these peoples have become *indigenous* over the course of the last three or four decades – however this would always be

defined in terms of alterity, or in other words, according to what is *not indigenous*. This led Mary Louise Pratt (2007) to propose that the term *indigenous* has been based from its very beginnings on a conception of time and space linked to the colonial encounter, since it refers to those who were 'already there' when the colonizers arrived.⁶

This relational nature of the indigenous identity is even more evident in contexts of non-European colonization, where we find a broader political debate between various cultural communities focused on who is indigenous and who is not. A clear example of these disputes, that denaturalize indigenous identity, is the analysis conducted by Amita Baviskar (2007) on the way that indigeneity discourses are used by the right-wing in India to exclude religious minorities such as Muslims – in contrast to the struggle in this same country by Adivasi tribal groups to make use of international instruments on indigenous rights, in order to avoid being forcibly displaced from their homes so that a dam can be built.

If we situate the emergence of these identities historically and if we denaturalize the definition of *being indigenous*, we find that this social construction has taken place in the framework of dialogues of power in which the hegemonic discourses of nation-states, of international entities and social scientists have been used, resisted, re-elaborated or rejected by the social actors who have begun to identify themselves as indigenous, and have used this definition to establish a position from which they can take political action. It is in this sense that I am referring to *indigeneity* as a field of power in which various social actors participate in a struggle for the construction of meaning, in the framework of systems of economic, racial and gender inequality that determine the legitimization and de-legitimization of the various definitions.

From this perspective, this chapter and my previous writings on the indigenous movement in Mexico are part – although marginally – of

this field of power in which different definitions of what it is to be indigenous are confronted. By acknowledging my participation in these dialogues and the productive capacity of academic knowledge, I am positioning myself politically as one of the voices defending a broad, non-exclusionary definition of the indigenous identity, which acknowledges the multiplicity of political genealogies and experiences characterizing the sense of belonging to this imagined community. I therefore reject the temptation to reify indigenous identities on the basis of authenticity criteria, whether involuntarily or strategically, since in my opinion this can contribute to creating new exclusions.

DEBATES ON EQUALITY AND DIFFERENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

There is a fairly generalized tendency among anthropologists in Latin America to support demands for recognition of indigenous rights. In the political arena, many of us have debated against liberal perspectives that, in the name of equal rights discourse, reject all policies that would grant cultural recognition.⁷ Such liberal perspectives continue to defend the formation of a monocultural state, while failing to recognize the long history of exclusion implicated in the developmentalist integrationism of Latin American states (Aguilar, 2004; Viqueira, 1999). These monocultural nationalisms flourished throughout all of Latin America during the nineteenth century and managed to permeate the collective imaginary around national identity.⁸

In exchange for belonging to the nation, it was necessary only to renounce 'backward' customs and identify with the national identity (assumed to be mestizo, Spanish-speaking and modern). This policy of 'equality' was the basis for a national identity that was implemented in many Latin American countries through physical and symbolic violence aimed at 'integrating Indians into the nation'.

For decades these experiences affected thousands of peasants from various regions of Latin America, and as a result, they rejected any identity other than a national identity.

This history of the imposition of monocultural national citizenship – with different degrees of violence – can be found in various indigenous regions of the Americas. And ironically, the equality discourse generated an intensification of inequality. To paraphrase Iris Marion Young, we can say that achieving formal equality did not eliminate social differences, and to the contrary, the rhetorical commitment to the equality of individuals made it impossible to even mention how these differences are structuring privilege and oppression (2000: 276).

A critical analysis of universal citizenship and of the failure of *indigenista* policies emphasizing integration and acculturation has led an entire generation of Latin American anthropologists to work together in solidarity with the struggles for the rights of indigenous peoples. This link between academia and indigenous movements has, since the 1970s, generated critical reflections by anthropologists such as Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Mercedes Olivera, Carlos Guzmán Bockler, Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira and Héctor Díaz Polanco. Their reflections have been appropriated and discussed by indigenous leaders who have resisted *indigenista* projects promoting acculturation in the name of development (Bonfil Batalla 1981). From sometimes contrasting perspectives – however, all influenced by Marxism and by theories of internal colonialism – this generation of critical anthropologists challenged the functionalist representations that some US anthropologists had developed for Latin American indigenous peoples as inhabitants of isolated, harmonious communities arising from ancient cultures. In contrast to these representations, the analysis by Latin American anthropologists emphasized the insertion of indigenous peoples in systems of inequality, and denounced the racism and economic marginalization

concealed behind the rhetoric of national integration.⁹

It was under the influence of this cultural climate and partly in response to the demands of indigenous organizations that a process of legislative reforms was initiated in the 1980s in a number of Latin American countries. These reforms were aimed at recognizing the multicultural nature of states, and replaced the discourse on equality with new rhetoric on cultural diversity and on the need to develop multicultural public policies. These reforms varied greatly from one country to another, however, most recognized the multicultural nature of the state and the collective rights of indigenous peoples, their normative systems and forms of self-government, and their right to use and preserve their own indigenous languages.¹⁰ Since these reforms, government censuses report the existence of 40 million men and women who identify themselves as being indigenous, representing approximately 10 per cent of the inhabitants of Latin America.¹¹

In this new political context, those who defend universal citizenship have raised their voices to reject or limit the scope of multicultural reforms attempting to isolate the cultural dimension from territorial or political dimensions. Separating policies of recognition from policies of redistribution has been a strategy of Latin American neoliberal states, aimed at making indigenous demands less radical. Many academics committed to the struggles of indigenous peoples have written about and denounced the new limitations placed on indigenous autonomy by these reforms (Hernández et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, other voices have questioned the 'indigenous resurgence' from other political positions and have pointed out the limitations of the indigenous identity as a space for political mobilization, or have denounced the way in which indigeneity has been used by neoliberal governments in the new strategy of control and regulation.

These perspectives suggest that multicultural reforms – by placing responsibilities in the hands of indigenous peoples and communities

that were previously state responsibilities – respond to the neoliberal agenda's decentralization and promotion of a more participative civil society, subscribing to the construction of what have been defined as *neoliberal citizenship regimes* (Yashar, 2005) or *neoliberal multiculturalism* (Hale, 2005). The social adjustment required in the neoliberal model includes the construction of a pluralist state in which everyone participates – and this may coincide with the political agenda of indigenous peoples demanding greater autonomy and greater possibilities for participation.

Although later works have attempted to demonstrate that countries making fewer structural reforms have adopted the multicultural agenda and vice versa – suggesting a weaker link between neoliberalism and multiculturalism (Van Cott, 2005) – these critical perspectives in relation to the multiculturalization of Latin American states have allowed us to reassess the successes of indigenous movements and to reconsider the focus on legislative reforms as the movement's main political strategy.

INDIGENOUS SOCIAL AGENCY IN RELATION TO NEOLIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM

In Mexico, multicultural reforms have been carried out nearly contemporaneously with constitutional reforms facilitating the restructuring of the economy in line with International Monetary Fund guidelines. These restructuring policies have included the privatization of semi-official companies, the removal of guaranteed prices for agricultural products, the elimination of subsidies and the opening of markets to import products. Economists describe these changes as a transition from the import substitution industrialization model, which prevailed in Mexico from 1940 to 1980, to an export oriented industrialization model. This new model prioritizes the opening up of markets, leaving

local producers to 'freely' confront the global market (Alvarez Bejar, 1992).

These economic reforms have been analysed in a context that explains the emergence of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (Collier, 1999; Harvey, 1998; Rus et al., 2003). This indigenous uprising, which began in January 1994 in the Mexican state of Chiapas, revealed the exclusions inherent in the neoliberal model, and contributed an alternative concept of cultural rights to the debate – in which the right to land, control over territory and self-determination were fundamental elements.

During the last 10 years, we have witnessed the consolidation of a politics of representation in which the slogan 'a world in which many worlds fit' has prompted the rethinking of political alliances from a non-exclusionary indigenous identity. The point here is not to assess the political achievements of Zapatism. However, beyond the difficulties this movement has experienced in building national alliances, it is important to recognize the impact of its cultural politics in destabilizing hegemonic visions of *indigeneity*. In other work I have argued that, at the level of politics of representation, Zapatism has provoked points of rupture in the state's hegemony, demanding the power to 'name' and establish the terms of dialogue, by reorienting the debate on multiculturalism to a discussion on the autonomy and self-determination of indigenous peoples (Hernández Castillo, 2001). At the same time, this indigenous movement has responded to hegemonic representation in relation to indigenous culture by defending non-essentialist perspectives that include reformulating traditions, indigenous law and forms of local government, from perspectives that are more inclusive of men and women (Speed et al., 2006).

The Zapatism experience is not an isolated one. In a collective study in 10 indigenous regions in Mexico, Guatemala and Colombia, we have found that in contexts where indigenous women are organizing around political and/or productive objectives, they are

theorizing on their culture from perspectives that reject the hegemonic definitions of tradition and culture imposed by official *indigenism* and by the most conservative sectors of national indigenous organizations. They point to the need to change the elements in 'customs' that exclude and marginalize women (Hernández Castillo et al., 2008).

These counter-hegemonic constructions of indigenous identities take place even in institutional contexts produced by multicultural reforms. A case in point is the Indigenous Tribunal of Cuetzalan, in the Nahuatl region of the Sierra Norte in the Mexican state of Puebla. The experience of this Tribunal in reconstituting community law has been analysed by Adriana Terven (2005). The Tribunal was created in May 2002, based on an agreement by the Plenary Court of Justice in the framework of a series of reforms in state-level legislature for incorporating the recognition of cultural diversity. This space has been appropriated by the region's indigenous organizations, which have decided to 'reactivate' their normative systems and reproduce their own cultural logic. Women have actively participated in this re-invention of indigenous law – after having organized for years around gender equity through a craftswomen's organization called Maseualsiamej (Mejía, 2008). The participation of some of these indigenous women leaders in the Advisory Council for the Indigenous Tribunal and the links between this Council and the local Indigenous Women's Center (which has worked to support victims of sexual and domestic violence) have facilitated a process of reflection on the most inclusive forms of indigenous justice, including the experiences and reflections arising from the struggles for women's rights at the regional level.

If we consider the state's hegemony as an unfinished process, we can understand that the agenda of neoliberal multiculturalism has not been completely successful, and that because of its need to reinforce civil society and promote decentralization, it has also opened up new opportunities for indigenous peoples to work toward expanding their possibilities for autonomy and self-determination.

Based on the analysis of these experiences and other similar ones in other geographic and cultural contexts (Hodgson, 2002, Tuhiwai Smith, 2007), I have reservations regarding the analytical perspectives that emphasize the productive capacity of state discourses on indigeneity, without acknowledging the capacity of social actors to respond to or reject these constructions.

Some of these analysts have pointed to the close links between the multiculturalization of Latin American states and neoliberal structural reforms (Hale, 2005). They have also referred to the way in which neoliberal governments have – instead of acknowledging the cultural practices and identities of indigenous peoples – dedicated their efforts to constructing identities that new legislative frameworks claim to represent. These analysts have argued that the state imposition of definitions of ‘indigenous cultures’ as ‘pre-modern’ and linked to poverty, have allowed neoliberal governments to justify economic exclusions in the name of culture (Escobar, 1997; Martínez Novo, 2006, 2007).

While these perspectives draw attention to the way these cultural differences are used politically by nation-states and capital, they offer us very little on the responses and resistance by the social actors defined as ‘indigenous’ to these policies of representation. The construction of indigeneity is not a process that moves in a single direction. The hegemony of government definitions is being fragmented by discourses and representations constructed through the daily life and political practices of the social movements that these policies are intended to regulate.

INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES: CHALLENGES FROM OTHER SUBALTERN IDENTITIES

Not only have those defending liberalism and universal citizenship criticized identity politics in a broader sense and more specifically in relation to the politicization of indigenous

identities, but also left-oriented sectors that continue to prioritize a class-based perspective and the anti-capitalist struggle as the primary strategies for building social justice and proposing political strategies. Tensions, differences and confrontations between the Marxist left and indigenous movements have characterized national liberation struggles in Central America. And they continue to affect political life in countries such as Guatemala and Nicaragua, where the building of political alliances has been hindered by resistance on the part of the Marxist left to acknowledge their racism and ethnocentrism.¹²

These perspectives insist that the left’s political project must be universalist in nature: intended for all human beings regardless of their cultural, ethnic or gender identities. This is based on the premise of ‘common interest’, which is placed above and beyond the specific interests of identity groups (Hobsbawm, 1996). From these political perspectives, gender or anti-racist demands must be framed within the anti-capitalist struggle. Nevertheless, the history of socialism has demonstrated that sexism and racism are not rooted in the capital–labour contradiction, and that woman, indigenous and other excluded groups have not always found social justice in the political projects professing to be universal in nature.

The need to build political alliances between different struggles continues to be one of the primary concerns of the democratic left in Latin America. It is important to reflect upon the criticisms made of indigenous identities by other subaltern identity spaces not included within the field of power corresponding to indigeneity. In particular, I would like to respond to some of the criticisms made of the concept of indigenous identities based on the perspectives of diaspora theory and transnationalism; the experiences of Afro-Latinos and mestizos in Latin America; and feminist analyses.

Diasporic and transnational identities

One of the important criticisms made of the indigenous political agenda is that it is based

on identitary definitions that refer to historic connections with a specific territory ('people bred upon that very soyle [sic]', 'native peoples') and to an alterity clearly defined on the basis of differentiated cultural logics ('alternative epistemologies' and 'holistic cosmovisions'). These definitions exclude human collectives that, while they share the experience of racism and colonialism, have been characterized by territorial mobility and cultural hybridity. Various 'deterritorialized' intellectuals have questioned the political effectiveness of indigeneity discourses that vindicate ancestral roots in specific territories, precisely at a moment in history when 170 million people around the world are not living in the countries in which they were born. The so-called diaspora theory has represented an analytical alternative for those interested in reflecting upon dispersed communities whose origins are linked to colonialism and imperialism.

These analytical perspectives, developed most notably in the fields of cultural studies (Gilroy, 1987; Hall, 1993) and postcolonial studies, borrow the concept of diaspora from analyses of Jewish history, and apply it to other displacement experiences. They use the historical reference points of colonialism and the various forms of power that have forced people to move from metropolitan centres to colonial peripheries – in the case of colonizers, slaves, migrant workers – and in the opposite direction, after the decolonization processes of the twentieth century. Diasporic identities characterize the communities that reside outside their 'territories of origin' or outside those territories that are imagined to be their 'native land' and that maintain the cultural features of their native communities. Generally, these cultures have been analyzed from perspectives that emphasize cultural hybridity and porous cultural borders, and that question ethnic absolutisms and nativisms that claim decolonization can be achieved by returning to native territories (see Gilroy, 1993).

The deterritorialized Jewish community has been the case *par excellence* in diaspora

studies, however this same perspective has been used to analyse the African diaspora (Gilroy, 1993; Jalloh and Maizlish, 1996; Lemelle and Kelley, 1994), Irish diaspora (Akenson, 1993; Bielenberg, 2000), Cuban diaspora (Bonnin and Brown, 2002), Mexican diaspora (Rouse, 1991) and Indian diaspora (Shukla, 2001), to mention only some of the examples.

If studies of indigenous identities have tended to emphasize their cultural integrity, alternative epistemologies, connections to the earth and to territory, and historic continuity, then in contrast, studies of diasporic identities have pointed to porous borders, deterritorialization, cultural fragmentation and historic discontinuity. There has been a tendency to contrast these two theoretical perspectives, without recognizing the analytical and political bridges being built by the social actors – of flesh and bones – who are described by these conceptual apparatuses.

The migration of indigenous Latin Americans to the US and Europe has created a point of convergence between the struggles for cultural recognition and the struggles for migrant rights, redefining indigenous identities in transnational contexts (Besserer, 2006; Kearney, 1996). Patricia Artía (2008), in her work on the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations (*Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Bi-Nacionales*), analyses the experiences of Mixtec women who have built political alliances with Laotian, Hmong and El Salvadoran women, in the framework of an oral history workshop designed to recapture their experiences as indigenous, as women and as migrants. The result of this experience is a collective book entitled *Immigrant Women: A Road to the Future*, in which these women from different cultural communities unite their voices to denounce the racism and sexism of US society. From these perspectives, diasporic identities and indigenous identities are not viewed as contrasting, but rather as complementary, in their struggle for citizen rights.

Although Latin American indigenous migration has been analysed from the theoretical

framework of transnationalism, there are currently proposals to begin to create bridges between diaspora theory and transnational indigenous studies, with the aim of understanding how being indigenous is given a new meaning when the link between identity and territory no longer exists (Clifford, 2007). One of the fundamental differences established between diaspora experiences and transnational identities is that it is assumed in the first case that returning to the community of origin is not possible and/or desirable for the social actors involved and therefore the community of origin becomes a mythical place of reference in the reconstitution of diasporic cultures. Meanwhile, transnational identities are assumed to be closely linked to the community of origin, with multi-local affiliations.

Studies conducted in various indigenous regions of Mexico, although primarily among Mixtecs in the state of Oaxaca (Besserer, 2006; Kearney, 1996), have revealed fallacies in the modernization paradigm used to analyse migration from a bipolar perspective that emphasized the tendency of migrants to lose their connection with their regions of origin and to begin to integrate into the receiving society. The studies of the communities referred to as 'deterritorialized' (Glick Schiller et al., 1992) analyse the bonds that migrants have with their families, communities and traditions, beyond the nation-states to which they have migrated. These changes in the perspectives used to analyse migration – which began particularly in the early 1990s – invite us to broaden our own perspectives on indigeneity and community, and to break away from the connection between identity and territory, in order to explore the way in which a deterritorialized sense of belonging is constructed, often through multi-local affiliations (Bash et al., 1994; Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Rouse, 1992).

It is important to recognize that even before the intensification of migratory processes in indigenous regions toward urban areas within the same countries and toward more industrialized countries (particularly the US, Canada

and Spain), territorial mobility was already part of the experiences constituting the indigenous identity in various regions of Latin America. A case in point is the Mam population in Chiapas with which I have been working for the past 15 years. When analysing the historic construction of their indigenous identities, it is especially helpful to make use of the methodological approach of transnationalism, since the cultural identities of Mams have been affected by migratory experiences: from Guatemala to Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century and to various regions in the state of Chiapas throughout the twentieth century. The sense of belonging to an *imagined community* has been linked to a historic memory more than to territory. Therefore, their recent migrations to the east coast of the US (Hernández Castillo, in press) may be one more story to tell in the reconstruction of narratives of belonging that continue to be socialized in family get-togethers or in the *Palabra* and *Música Mam* radio programs broadcast weekly on the *Voz de la Frontera Sur*. At the same time Mam peasants may be developing multi-local affiliations, as they maintain their family and social bonds with their communities of origin through new communication technologies, and as they build new communities in the space they share with Guatemalan workers in the US. These multi-local affiliations were preceded by the formation of multiple identities – which allow them to make demands as peasants, indigenous, Mams or Jehovah's Witnesses at any time, depending on the context.

Perhaps recent advances in communication technologies allow the connections between different localities to be more intense than in the past between the Sierra Madre of Chiapas and the Cuchumatán region of Guatemala. However, the experiences of territorial mobility and transnational community are not new for indigenous Mams. And despite the violence associated with the integrationist programs of the Mexican state, their *imagined community* has even included Mam-speakers who remained on the other

side of the border. Ironically, economic globalization processes instead of wiping out their indigenous identities – have led them to re-discover their ‘Guatemalan indigenous brothers and sisters’ thousands of kilometres from their communities of origin. For some of them, this has represented a return to their indigenous identity, and a return of their native language – which the integrationist programmes of the Mexican state attempted to destroy.¹³

Innovative multi-local ethnographies indicate how these new networks have formed ‘transnational communities’ in which people have essentially dual lives (Portes, 1995: 812). The extent to which second and third generation indigenous inhabitants of Chiapas will be able to maintain these dual lives is not yet clear. We do know, however, that the process of cultural homogenization anticipated by the most apocalyptic perspectives on globalization does not appear to be an immediate reality for ‘border crossers’ *par excellence*.

The persistence of indigenous identities within the globalization process does not, however, necessarily involve anti-systemic, contesting identities. Some authors such as Zygmunt Bauman (2001) propose that the regeneration of identities is linked to the current phase in the globalization of capital, and that this phenomenon is a response to the exacerbated individualization suffered by industrialized societies. In this regard he indicates that these new identities being reinvented in the framework of the globalization process are not contrary to the globalizing tendency, nor do they get in its way, but rather, constitute a legitimate offshoot and natural companion of globalization. Far from detaining globalization, according to Bauman, these identities ‘grease the wheels’ of globalization (Bauman, 2001: 174).

It is difficult to predict the future of indigenous identities in the new transnational context, and specifically in the case of the Pan-Mayan identities taking shape from Los Angeles to Guatemala, passing through Chiapas and Yucatan. However, other experiences in

indigenous migration indicate that these identities do not always ‘grease the wheels of capital’, and in fact often obstruct the capacity to extract profit and to promote homogenized forms of consumption. The experiences of transnational organizations of indigenous migrants, as described by Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado (2004), and those of indigenous women in the oral history workshop (Artfa, 2008), describe a rather encouraging scenario in which the globalization of grassroots solidarity has made it possible for indigenous people from various regions of Mexico and around the world to build common fronts for demanding labour rights, to struggle for better working conditions and to demand migration reforms that will allow them full citizenship.

In the new transnational context, indigenous Latin Americans are establishing alliances and coordinating actions with the Native American population and with migrants from various countries. They identify themselves as indigenous in certain contexts, as Mexican migrants in others, and as agricultural workers when they are mobilizing around labour demands. The tensions and contradictions evident in theoretical debates between diasporic identities and indigenous identities do not appear to present a problem for the political actions of these human collectives.

The way that social actors imagine their identities and defend them as spaces for political action, depends a great deal on their personal and organizational histories. If in our academic work we reify some identities as more authentic or more emancipative than others, we may actually encourage new exclusions. Some imagine and defend these identities as ancient identities linked to the earth and to territory, while others reconstruct them as hybrid identities open to change and characterized by different affiliations. If as academics, we make either of these perspectives appear to be the norm, we will be silencing and colonizing the experiences of both those defending indigeneity and those defending diaspora identities.

Revisiting mestizaje and Afro-Latin identities

Other important criticisms that should be taken into account, as we re-think the conceptualization of indigenous identities and the construction of political alliances, are those made by scholars investigating mestizaje as the cultural identity of subaltern sectors. Many of these works have served to challenge the analysis of mestizaje exclusively as the dominant ideology in national projects in Latin America. The abundant Latin American literature on mestizaje, nationalism and racism produced in recent decades has failed to consider an analysis of processes in which a portion of the considerable marginalized sectors are appropriating mestizaje as their cultural identity.¹⁴ In other words, we are referring here to the construction of mestizaje at the grassroots level – which has not always coincided with the developments and representations in official discourse.

Anthropological studies on the construction of Mestizo identities, which have proliferated in recent years, have used two important theoretical works as their analytical point of reference.¹⁵ From different textual strategies and perspectives, these two works have confronted ethnic essentialisms, pointing to the need for re-thinking the matter of mestizaje and recognizing the existence of fluid cultural borders in an increasingly globalized world. Reflections on the *Nueva Mestiza* by Chicana writer and literary critic Gloria Anzaldúa, published in 1987, and the conceptualization of hybrid cultures proposed by Mexican–Argentinian anthropologist Néstor García Canclini in 1989, confronted the essentialist discourses defended by both the Chicano movement in the US and the indigenous movement in Latin America.

In the US at the end of the 1980s, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, a book of poetry, literary essays and social analysis written in *Spanglish* by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), became a fundamental

book for political analysts and activists who defended the emergence of new hybrid cultures, and for various reasons, did not identify with those who – from feminist or nationalist postures – promoted a type of identity politics based on an essentialist conception of identities. With her own experience, she demonstrates the limitations of identity policies based on criteria of authenticity and exclusion. Anzaldúa's work did not intend to establish a general theory of identity, or claim that identities were always experienced as multiple and contradictory, but rather to simply acknowledge that in the new global context there are many individuals like her, who experience a complex mixture of identities that keep their head 'buzzing' with all the contradictions.

In 1989 Néstor García Canclini published his book *Culturas Híbridas. Estrategias para Entrar y Salir de la Modernidad* (later published in English in 1995, with the title *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*) at a time when most Latin American anthropologists had united around support for the demands of Latin American indigenous movements. The book *México Profundo. Civilización Negada* by Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, was being discussed and cited not only in academic classrooms, but also in the meetings and workshops of indigenous organizations. The distinction between *México Profundo*, based on the ethical-political values of the indigenous world, and *México Imaginario*, emerging from the individualist values of western society, became an analytical scheme for understanding not only the reality in Mexico, but in all of Latin America. Confronting these dichotomous visions of Latin American reality, Néstor García Canclini borrowed the concept of hybridization from natural sciences, to refer to socio-cultural processes in which discrete practices or structures, existing separately, are combined to generate new structures, objects and practices. It is nearly impossible, he said, in an increasingly globalized world to continue to speak of 'pure' or 'authentic' cultures, and he rejected the existence of identities

characterized by self-contained, ahistorical essences.

His radical criticism of identities contrasts with the analytical perspectives that continue to defend the existence of different – and in many ways, opposing – cultural logics between indigenous and non-indigenous individuals. Not only does he reject the importance, at the political level, of the indigenous identity as an organizational space, but he relativizes the notion of identity and at the methodological level, he proposes replacing identity as an object of study with intercultural heterogeneity and hybridation. Leaning toward postmodern scepticism of identity politics, Néstor García Canclini theorizes and goes about his academic work without taking the indigenous movement into consideration. He focuses his attention on cultural industries and on urban-popular cultures – and this allows him to explore with precision the hybridation processes that interest him. He never concerns himself with explaining why – despite the existence of ‘porous’ cultural borders and permanent hybrid and mixed processes – indigenous identities continue to be imagined as solid identities that have inherited ancient cultures and therefore the articulation of regional and local struggles continues throughout the American continent.

While these two works cannot be considered anthropological studies in the strictest sense, both contributed to reformulating the terms of the discussion on mestizaje and creating the cultural climate for the academic legitimization of mestizo identities as subaltern identities, and for some authors, emancipatory identities.

A pioneering work in ethnographic research of this topic is the study conducted by Marisol de la Cadena (2005) on the ‘indigenous mestizos’ in Peru. She demonstrates that the term ‘mestizo’ – unlike the term ‘hybrid cultures’ – is not only an analytical concept and an ideology of domination, but it has become a term of self-identification for poor peasants who view the mestizo identity as a way to move up the social scale and more easily access benefits as a Peruvian

citizen – without necessarily losing the features of the indigenous culture that are significant in their lives. Marisol de la Cadena, like Gloria Anzaldúa, does not so much defend the transforming potential of the mestizo identity, but rather, describes it as a reality in which thousands of Peruvians live, and recognizes that, on the one hand, the ‘de-Indianization’ aspect of mestizaje can legitimize the discrimination against those considered to be Indian, however at the same time, it can open up possibilities for a better life, without the need to renounce indigenous ways, styles and beliefs (2000: 6).

Along the same line of analysis, Jan French points out that renewed interest on the part of academics and activists in the concept of mestizaje can be explained by the fact that it opens up some possibilities in relation to the dilemmas presented by neoliberal multiculturalism. Specifically, it resolves the problem of deciding who is indigenous and who is not, it does not exclude other subaltern groups that cannot claim to be culturally different, and it avoids the formation of new ethnic barriers and new exclusions (French, 2007: 6).

Without failing to recognize the importance of these criticisms of identity purisms, the problem with some of these analytical perspectives is that, once again, they appear to present mestizaje as an identity of a prescriptive nature more than as an experienced reality. A new type of universalism seems to be hidden behind these demands of hybridity and mestizaje as spaces *par excellence* for imagining the alternative modernities of the globalized world.

From other political positionings, a number of scholars of Afro-Latino cultures have also pointed to the way in which imaginaries around indigeneity have contributed toward strengthening the connection between the recognition of collective rights and the existence of differentiated cultural features in subaltern groups, making the political struggles of Afro-descendants difficult. These perspectives have indicated that in the struggle for the recognition of communal lands, there has

been a tendency to defend the existence of a special spiritual relationship between indigenous peoples and 'Mother Earth'. This places black communities at a disadvantage when it comes to demanding this type of right, since they are not imagined to possess this kind of connection (Hooker, 2005; Ng'weno, 2007). The influence of the indigeneity discourse in the legitimization of communal lands is reflected in the fact that the Afro-descendent communities that have gained recognition of their collective rights are those who have managed to make their demands from the position of having cultural identities presented as indigenous.¹⁶ This has led some authors to speak of the 'indigenization' of Afro-descendent identities (Wade, 2006).

While this process could be interpreted as Afro-Latinos appropriating the strategies used in the struggles waged by indigenous movements, it is not without its contradictions, since many black populations that have not managed to present themselves as 'culturally different' have not enjoyed the benefits of the redistribution processes accompanying some of the multicultural reforms in Latin America. In addition to this example of political exclusion, the most important criticism made by these authors in relation to the rhetoric of indigeneity is the tendency to replace struggles against racial discrimination with struggles for cultural recognition. The neoliberal regimes of multicultural citizenship are more open to listening and responding to demands made on the basis of cultural or ethnic differences than those made on the basis of a claim of racial discrimination (Anderson, 2007; Hooker, 2005; Wade, 2006). In the first case, the need for transformations in racialized structures of inequality can be avoided or silenced, since it is possible to speak of culture without speaking of power, while it is impossible to speak of racism and exclusion without denouncing the perpetuation of systems of inequality and internal colonialism.

According to these authors, the imaginaries mobilized around indigeneity have diminished the possibilities for anti-racist political

alliances between indigenous and Afro-descendent movements. In the examples of the 'indigeneization' of black struggles, such as the case of the Garifunas of Honduras (analysed by Mark Anderson [2007]), a specific type of collective subject with differentiated cultural characteristics has been prioritized. The struggles of the Garifunas have been subordinated to discourse on indigenous rights, and this has signified that their demands in relation to racism and economic exclusion have been displaced.

From a perspective that emphasizes the productive capacity of state discourses, these critics of indigeneity point out that the way in which indigenous subjectivities and the subjectivities of Afro-descendents are imagined and mobilized in the framework of the new Latin American multiculturalism is not only a reflection of essential identities, but it is also a result of the differentiated way in which these two subaltern groups have been historically racialized.

In an effort to denaturalize the differences between black cultures and indigenous cultures in Latin America, Peter Wade (1997), has historicized the way in which indigenous have been 'constructed' – characterized as pre-modern and profoundly different culturally, however also as raw material in the construction of Latin American mestizo nations. Blacks, for their part, have been 'constructed' as being from outside the nation and 'decultured'. This has meant that the black population has tended to propose their demands more in terms of anti-racist struggles and struggles for civil rights that will allow them to be included in the national project through full citizenship, and not in terms of differentiated cultural rights.

These demands from the perspective of historic constructivism, aimed at understanding the way in which the cultural differences of Afro-descendent and indigenous populations have been impacted by discourses of power, allow us to denaturalize and re-think these differences from more inclusive perspectives that open the way to political alliances. This is precisely what has been taking place in various parts of the continent, where struggles

for the recognition of cultural rights have been waged alongside anti-racism struggles. The Zapatista movement is one example that has placed the problem of racism in Mexico on the political debate agenda. It has also waged a political struggle for the recognition of the collective rights of indigenous peoples. Alliances between Afro-descendants and indigenous are also being established in Ecuador, Brazil and Colombia, on the basis of an anti-racist political platform.

There are other experiences characterized by the resurgence of Afro-descendent identities, and the articulation of their struggles with those of the indigenous movement, however there is little analysis on these phenomena. The *moreno* populations inhabiting the Costa de Guerrero coastal region in Mexico provide one example. These groups have historically identified themselves as *costeños* (people from the Coast) and have begun to build alliances with the indigenous movement in the same Mexican state, on the basis of their identities as Afro-Mexicans. An autonomous inter-cultural university project Universidad del Sur (UNISUR), without state support and without official recognition, is currently being developed. Mestizo, indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities have come together to initiate an educational project based on their cultural and social specificities. In this case the official constructions of 'alterity' have been answered with the emergence of more open perspectives on indigenous identities that include mestizo and *moreno* peasants. Beyond the specific terms of self-identification, this political project has appropriated the international tools for indigenous rights to use them in their demands for the right to self-government and to multi-lingual, intercultural education.

FEMINIST CRITICISMS OF INDIGENEITY

Finally, I would like to address the criticisms of indigeneity on the part of feminist analyses

of cultural identities and ethnic nationalisms. There is considerable literature on feminist theory that asserts that both official and ethnic nationalisms have tended to use women's bodies as raw material in the construction of their political projects (Gutiérrez Chong, 2004; Yuval Davis, 1997).

These perspectives have pointed out that the emphasis on the multicultural policies has led to the strengthening of cultural essentialisms that often serve patriarchal interests within identity collectives. The ahistorical representations of cultures as homogenous entities of shared values and customs, existing on the margin of power relations, lead to cultural fundamentalisms that view any attempt by women to transform practices negatively affecting their lives as a threat to the group's collective identity. By historicizing cultural practices, such as sati (widows being burned alive in the funeral pyres of their husbands) (Mani, 1998; Oldenburg Veena, 1994) and infibulation or genital mutilation (Koso-Tomas, 1987; Mama, 1995; Mari Tripp, 2002), these feminists have been able to demonstrate that many of the 'traditional' practices negatively affecting and attacking the lives of women have changed over time, that they often originated in colonial contexts, and that when they are modified or done away with, this does not affect the group's identity continuity.

These studies have shown us that when the transformation of certain traditions affect the interests of the sectors in power, then arguments are raised with regard to the dangers to cultural integrity. A case in point is the debate around the agricultural rights of women in Africa and in various countries in South Asia, where the argument of 'defending traditions' has been used to delegitimize women's demands for land (Mari Tripp, 2002). These reflections by postcolonial feminisms assist us to re-think indigenous cultures from analytical perspectives that include the dialogues of power on which they were constituted. By deconstructing the way in which certain features are selected (and others are not) as representative of a culture

or as vital to an identity, we can reveal the networks of power hiding behind the representation of difference.

In the Latin American context, some academics who defend indigenous rights have contributed to developing idealized representations of these peoples, without leaving any room for the voices and challenges of women within those very groups. These representations have been used by groups in these collectives who possess power, in order to legitimize their privileges. The other extreme of this perspective has been represented by those who disqualify all the institutions and practices of indigenous peoples on the basis of their colonial origin, and who stereotype their cultures – also on the basis of ‘selective labelling’.

This is a debate in which I have been politically involved in Mexico. Over a number of decades mine has been among the voices critical of the essentialism in the Mexican indigenous movement, which has refused to address the issue of gender-based exclusions and domestic violence within indigenous communities.

Because of my double identity as an academic and as an activist in a feminist organization working against sexual and domestic violence through a support centre for women and children (in which a high percentage of women seeking help were indigenous), I have had to confront both discourses idealizing the indigenous culture, elaborated by a significant sector of Mexican anthropologists, and the ethnocentrism of a major sector of liberal feminism. In a polarized context in which women’s rights have been presented as opposed to the collective rights of peoples, it has been difficult to defend less extreme perspectives on indigenous cultures that recognize the power dialogues through which they are constituted, and at the same time, to defend the right to one’s own culture and the self-determination of indigenous peoples.

This polarization of feminists and Indianist postures intensified during the last decade, after the Zapatista movement proposed the need to reform the constitution so that the

autonomous rights of indigenous peoples would be recognized (Hernández Castillo, 2002). In this context, a major sector of Mexico’s liberal feminists developed alliances with liberal anti-autonomous sectors, in order to emphasize the dangers that recognizing the collective rights of indigenous peoples would represent for indigenous women. Suddenly, a number of academics who had never written a single line in favour of indigenous women began to express their ‘concern’ for their rights, and even to cite – out of context – the works of some feminist academics, myself included, who had written on domestic violence in indigenous regions. This particular situation changed the context for framing our academic work, indicating the need to contextualize our reflections on domestic violence beyond cultural analyses, to include an analysis of state violence and to emphasize the importance of the structural context in which this violence occurs (Hernández Castillo, 2006).

At this political crossroads, organized indigenous women were the ones who gave us some clues on how to re-think indigenous demands from a non-essentialist perspective. Their theorizations on culture, tradition and gender equity were expressed in political documents, the minutes of meetings and public discourses.¹⁷ Indigenous women never asked for this ‘protection’ from liberal intellectuals or from the state, which would only limit the autonomy of their people. To the contrary, they have defended their right to self-determination and to their own culture, while fighting within the indigenous movement to redefine the terms in which tradition and custom are understood and to actively participate in building autonomous projects.

A significant sector of Mexico’s hegemonic feminists have raised their voices to defend the liberal rights of equality without analysing the relationship between liberalism and feminism, and while assuming, on principle, that liberalism has given greater equity to women,¹⁸ than the indigenous cultures in which women continue to be victim to forced marriage, polygamy, segregation and political

exclusion, to name some of the 'backward' practices mentioned as part of 'indigenous cultures'. Feminists from India, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) and Lata Mani (1999), have responded to representations such as those from Mexican critics of the recognition of indigenous rights by pointing out that presenting the women of the 'Third World' (in our case, indigenous women) as simply victims of patriarchy is a form of discursive colonialism that denies the spaces that women have opened up in the framework of their own cultural dynamics.¹⁹

In Mexico, a response to these representations is being offered by an indigenous women's movement, which appeared under the influence of the Zapatista uprising. This movement has focused efforts on reformulating the demands for national multicultural recognition based on a broader definition of culture that includes not only the hegemonic voices and representations, but also the diversity of voices and contradictory processes that lend meaning to the life of a human collective.

However, this reformulation of indigenous identities by women is not exclusive to the Mexican process. During the last decade we have seen organizational processes of indigenous women emerging in various regions of Latin America. In these processes the collective demands of their peoples are conjugated with their specific gender-related demands. We might point out that we have been witnesses to the emergence of a new political identity that cannot be absorbed within the political identities of indigenous movements or within the gender identities of feminist movements.

The different political genealogies and personal histories of organized indigenous women in Latin America have defined the way in which these women and their organizations prioritize or do not prioritize the gender-related demands and/or the collective demands of their peoples. The significant degree of internal diversity in the continental movement of indigenous women is both its strength and its weakness. Reaching consensus or proposing general demands has involved

negotiating political perspectives around how culture is experienced and conceptualized, and around the rights and relationships between men and women. These tensions are especially evident within the Guatemalan Mayan movement in which indigenous women have broadly debated the tensions between gender and culture, and are the continent's pioneers in systematizing their reflections on these issues.²⁰

Given the diversity of voices emerging from organizations of indigenous women, it is easy to be tempted to legitimize some and silence others, considering those who defend the indigenous cosmovision as a space of resistance to be 'authentic', and discrediting those who propose the existence of an indigenous feminism as 'acculturated'. Or at the other extreme, labelling those in ethnic-political movements who reject feminisms as 'essentialist and conservative', or as opening up space in political and academic debates only to those who have the most in common with the agenda of urban, western feminism. Both perspectives can result in new strategies of discursive colonialism that deny the richness and complexity of these new political identities.

Acknowledging and recapturing these multiple voices is fundamental in order to assess the different contributions from women toward the construction of an inclusive, democratizing indigenous agenda.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

The purpose of this review of theoretical and political debates on indigeneity was not to seek the 'correct' perspective for understanding the reconfiguration of indigenous identities in Latin America. Rather, my aim has been to attempt to understand the political context in which analytical proposals have been made, with the objective of building bridges between different intellectual traditions.

The reservations expressed – from transnational perspectives, diaspora theory, Afro-Latin studies and feminist theory – with

regard to the indigenous identity as a space for political mobilization are not exclusively analytical exercises carried out in the academic world. In most cases they have been written from political positions characterized by concern for building social justice from the perspective of an inclusive political agenda.

As I have attempted to demonstrate through concrete examples, the fears existent around exclusions and cultural fundamentalisms have not always been well substantiated. The analytical constructions of what is *indigenous*, as elaborated in discourses of power, have been responded to in diverse and contradictory ways by indigenous migrants in the US, indigenous Zapatistas in Chiapas, coalitions of indigenous, mestizos and Afro-Mexicans in Guerrero, and by the continental movement of indigenous women – and in all these cases we find examples of non-essentialist, inclusive definitions of what is understood as ‘to be indigenous’. The phantom of ‘cultural fundamentalism’ should not cause us to discredit a priori the political struggles of those social actors who have found a point of support in the indigenous identity that allows them to imagine themselves in the world and to confront the homogenizing tendency in economic globalization.

Many of these voices are indicating that modernity as a cultural system – which has left a significant portion of humanity behind, including women and indigenous, and which has constructed a system of values and powers by denying all that is not masculine and western – is in crisis and should be replaced with some type of alternative project. And many of these same voices – as they work to construct this new alternative project – have turned their focus to the knowledge that they are constructing as ‘ancestral’, and that allows them to think that other possible futures do indeed exist.

Some of the elements in epistemological and political proposals from the various subaltern identities that I have addressed in this chapter could be useful in reformulating the academic definitions of *indigenous*, from the perspective of non-prescriptive visions.

The criticisms generated by transnational theory, by diaspora theory, by ‘feminists of colour’ (to use a concept of self-definition) and by postcolonial feminists point to the need to profoundly re-think the construction of *indigenous* – not to discard the concept as an analytical tool, not to delegitimize the struggles of indigenous organizations, but to contribute, from our work as academics, to the construction of more inclusive definitions of culture and identity.

NOTES

1 Translation by Jana Schroeder.

2 In De la Cadena, Marisol and Orin Starn 2007: 11.

3 I am using the concept ‘North’ from a geopolitical perspective, making use of the colloquial concept that we use in Latin America to refer basically to the US and Europe – where the majority of the literature on ‘indigeneity’ has originated. The dialogues I have narrated here have been established fundamentally in English-speaking academia, which include the diaspora of intellectuals from the ‘South’ who have migrated to the ‘North’.

4 In some cases translations have generated conceptual confusion, as in the case of ‘indigenism’, used in English by authors such as Ronald Niezen (2000) to refer to the transnational movement that has appropriated indigenous identity. In Spanish, however, *indigenismo* refers to state policies toward indigenous peoples, and in Latin America these policies have been characterized by their focus on integration.

5 I am borrowing the concept of *cultural climate* to refer to the expression of a specific configuration of worldviews in a given period of time, that generates a particular sensitivity to one problem or another, or that narrows or broadens the horizon for what seems socially and politically possible’ (Werner Brand, 1992: 2).

6 This argument differs from one of the positions taken in the political-academic debate in Latin America that also emphasizes the colonial nature of indigenous cultures, in order to discredit their ‘authenticity’ and to defend acculturation policies (Martínez Peláez, 1970; Aguirre Beltrán, 1970). Mary Louise Pratt does not refer to the colonial nature of cultural practices of the indigenous population, but instead, the relational nature of the origin of this self-definition.

7 There is a considerable amount of anthropological production in Latin America that defends the recognition of indigenous rights (Bengoa, 2000; Díaz

Polanco, 1998, 2006; Hernández Castillo et al., 2004; López Barcenás, 2000a, b, 2004; Stavenhagen and Iturralde, 1990; Sierra and Chenaut, 1995; and many others). There is also more recent production around multicultural reforms in Latin America and their impact on the lives of indigenous peoples, as presented at various conferences of the Latin American Network of Legal Anthropology (*Red Latinoamericana de Antropología Jurídica* – RELAJU). See <http://www.relaju.com>.

8 There are a number of works that analyse the formation of nationalist discourse, and the way in which such discourse was appropriated at the local level by subaltern classes (Gall, 2004; Mallón 1995).

9 In other writings I have analysed the importance of what has been referred to as co-participative research and/or action research, as methodological contributions of Latin American social sciences to the decolonization of knowledge (Hernández Castillo, 2007). It was based on these methodologies that alliances were constructed between critical anthropologists and indigenous movements. In the framework of these dialogues, an expanded reflection was generated of the colonial uses of anthropology, as expressed at the Barbados I and II meetings (see: abyayaia.nativeweb.org/declarations.barbados.1.html).

10 Various authors have analysed these legislative reforms and the multicultural public policies promoted by Latin American states (see Assies et al., 2000; Sieder, 2002; Van Cott, 2000).

11 This data is not very precise, since the criteria for defining who is indigenous and who is not vary greatly among different countries.

12 A political history of these tensions in the case of Guatemala can be found in MacLeod (2008). And see Hale (1994), regarding the conflict between Miskitos and Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

13 Many Mexican Mam migrants, who no longer spoke their native language due to the campaigns initiated by post-revolutionary governments to oblige them to speak Spanish, recuperated their language when they met Mam-speaking indigenous Guatemalans in the US. A Mam migrant from the municipality of Mazapa de Madero describes his migration experience, commenting: 'When I got there, I was surprised there were so many *idiomistas* (indigenous language speakers). Lots of *chapines* (Guatemalans) from over here in San Marcos and from Huehue (Guatemalan departments). But over there, we were all the same – there weren't any differences. They immediately explained to me where to buy food, and how to make cheaper calls to Mexico, with some phone cards that you could talk up to two hours for only five dollars. At first, when they talked among themselves, they spoke in Mam, and I didn't say anything and they thought I didn't understand. I was embarrassed by my pronunciation.

But I gradually tried harder, and it was as if the words of my grandfather came back to me, from when we were little and they spoke to us in *Tokiol* (Mam). What I didn't do with my Uncle Petronilo, I did on the other side [of the border], with my Guatemalan *compadres*. Now I joke with them in *Tokiol*, and nobody says whether I'm Guatemalan or Mexican – we're the same people and we help each other out'. (Interview with G. C., at the *Horizontes Ejido*, Mazapa de Madero, May, 1993).

14 My own work on the construction of a nation at the Mexico–Guatemala border analyses the use of the 'Myth of Mestizaje' as the justification for submitting the Mam population to campaigns of forced integration (Hernández Castillo, 2001). The pioneering work of Olivia Gall (2004) and Alicia Castellanos (1994) on racism in Mexico also addresses mestizaje as the ideology of power. Other analyses on the mestizaje-integrationism-racism connection can be found in Basave (1992), and Bastide (1970).

15 See Audinet (2004), De la Cadena (2000, 2005), Field (2002), French, (2004), Klor de Alva (1995) and Wade (2006).

16 Some examples are the Garifunas in Guatemala and Honduras, and the Sumos and Miskitos in Nicaragua.

17 Some of these documents, such as the Revolutionary Law on Women in the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*) and the speech by Zapatista *Comandante Esther* before the national Congress, defending indigenous law as a political construction that is being reconstituted by organized women, can be found in Speed et al. (2006).

18 I use the term 'hegemonic feminism' to refer to the feminism that has emerged in the country's central region and theorized in academia, and in which the struggle against abortion and in favour of reproductive rights has been the focus. Since the Coalition of Feminist Women was formed in 1976 and later the National Front for Women's Liberation and Rights (FNALIDM) in 1979, the legalization of abortion and the fight against domestic violence were the demands that kept this sector of feminists together. This sector of feminism dominated other popular and rural feminisms in which class demands were closely linked with gender demands. For a history of hegemonic feminism, see Tuñón (1997). For a history of popular feminism and the class-related nature of their demands, see Masolo (1992).

19 Other criticisms of the ethnocentrism of liberal feminism can be found in Alarcón (1990) and Trinh (1988).

20 See Alvarez (2005), Cumes (2007a), Chirix (2003), Gabriel (2004), Grupo de Mujeres Mayas Kaqila (2002, 2004), MacLeod and Cabrera (2000), Velásquez Nimantuj (2003).

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