Making the invisible visible : the position of indigenous women in Mexico. A general overview of the challenges ahead

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III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Every society treats gender and gender differences in a culturally specific way. Moreover, social relations and structures everywhere evolve over time, creating new variations. It is striking, though, that men have always had a leading position in the majority of cultures, while women have been to a lesser or greater degree subordinated. It was not until the 19th century that groups of women openly and systematically started defying the existing social gender division, and resisting oppression.

To better understand the present position of women in Mexican society, and in particular of indigenous women, it is important to look at certain historical evolutions, and to place current research in the context of feminism, including indigenous feminism.

The history of feminism can be divided in different phases. Usually, the concept of 'waves' is used to indicate the different periods, however, it is important to realize that this term should be used with caution. Different types of activism existed and still exist simultaneously, and others overlap (McPherson, 2000: 210). The division in waves is therefore only used to indicate general trends.

As there are specialized studies discussing feminist history in detail, the goal here is not to give a complete overview, but rather to point to certain trends that are relevant for this work. A brief overview will be given of the history of the feminist movement in the West, looking at general evolutions in Europe, in particular the United Kingdom, and in the United States of America, both precursors regarding women's rights. In Mexico, feminism developed almost in parallel with the movement in Europe and the U.S.A., but showed certain particularities worth explaining to understand the current situation of women in Mexico.

In colonial times, some individual actions of female resistance can be noted in Mexico. In the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, there was a first wave of feminist initiatives of Mexican women who openly started striving for the improvement of their rights. In her work *Contra viento y marea: el movimiento feminista en México hasta 1940* (2002), Anna Macías writes extensively about the first period of the feminist struggle, starting around the time of the Mexican Independence. It shows the long tradition of Mexican feminism, but also that feminism has often been used for political purposes rather than for the real improvement of the position of women. Macias' very complete study is one of the few on that period, therefore the following overview will be based primarily on this reference work.

The first feminist wave was followed by a second, and a third wave. The overview of second and third wave feminism presented here is primarily based on the work *Cuatro vertientes del feminismo en México. Diversidad de rutas y cruce de caminos*, by Gisela Espinosa Damián (2009). More studies on this period are available, but the work by Espinosa has been one of the most exhaustive studies recently published on the subject. In her work she divides Mexican feminism in four main currents: historical feminism (ca. 1960-1980), popular feminism (ca. 1980-1988), civil feminism (starting ca. 1980), and indigenous feminism (starting ca. 1990). These different currents were always the result of a specific political climate with its specific social changes. Espinosa points out that there are also many smaller currents, such as lesbian feminism, academic feminism, feminism that originated in political parties, Catholic Church, mass media, public administration, business world, etcetera. Unfortunately, the great diversity of currents had a negative effect on the feminist movement; instead of forming a united front, many groups were excluded.

Other publications about the evolution of Mexican feminism are for example, *Feminismo en México, ayer y hoy*, by Eli Bartra, Anna Fernández Poncela, and Ana Lau (2000); *Feminismo en México. Revisión histórico-crítica del siglo que termina*, by Griselda Gutiérrez Castañeda (2002); *Cartografías del feminismo mexicano 1970-2000*, by Nora Nínive García, Margara Millán, and Cynthia Pech (2007); and *Voces a las mujeres: antología del pensamiento feminista mexicano 1873-1953*, by Julia Tuñón (2011). These are all compilations of articles on a wide variety of topics by various Mexican scholars[22].

A. First Wave: A Feminism of Equal Rights

1. First Feminist Wave in the West

Throughout history there have been individual actions of female resistance against dominant patriarchal structures, yet only during the nineteenth and in the first half of the twentieth century, women openly started to oppose their inferior status. In Europe and the United States of America, social changes had an important influence on the emergence of a feminist movement. Due to the industrialization process, women started to participate in extra-domestic labor, mainly in factories. As a result, the differences between women and men became evident. Women, for example, earned less than men despite having equally heavy and dangerous jobs. In addition, they were excluded from the political decision-making process; men were allowed to dominate public life, women were

[22] For more information on the feminist movement in Latin America in general, see for example: S. CHANT and N. CRASKE (2007); E. MAIER, and N. LEBON (2010), *Women's Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean*, New Brunswick et al.: Rutgers University Press/ El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

confined to the private sphere (Sanders, 2004: 18). During this period, considered the first wave of feminist activity or pre-feminism, women mainly fought for political participation, and particularly for female suffrage.

Some women started to write about the social position of women, for example Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), and Jane Addams (1860-1935) (Holmes, 2007: 4).

In the West, the United Kingdom and the United States of America were home to the first suffragette movements. U.S.A. activism began around 1848, with the Seneca Falls Convention. This convention opposed the discrimination of women. In the United Kingdom, the first women's rights movements appeared in the 1850s. The suffragette movement became strongly militant, organizing public demonstrations and hunger strikes, with famous members such as Emily Davison (1872-1913), Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928), and Frances Parker (1875-1924).

Women of color also had feminist pioneers in this period. Most famous was the women's rights activist and abolitionist Sojourner Truth, Afro-American and born in slavery, who gave the speech "Ain't I a woman?" at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851. She was one of the first activists to urge for a non-racist approach in feminism (Essed, 2005: 2).

Not everyone sympathized with the women's movement. Numerous anti-suffragette movements, including both men and women, strongly opposed the female vote (Sanders, 2004: 27). They believed there was no reason for women to participate in politics. Women who did, would be betraying family values and destroy their homes. Politics would consume their lives, they would forget to look after their children and their husband, and neglect their household chores. Not to mention that they could vote in opposition to their husband, which was to be avoided at all cost. Dramatic anti-suffragette pamphlets showed crying families abandoned by their voting mothers. Later in this work we will also see how similar arguments are used by opponents of political participation of indigenous women.

Globally, New Zealand was the first country to accept female voting rights in 1893. In Europe, World War I tempered suffragette activism, but on a political level the movement gained strength. During the war, women were summoned to work in areas traditionally reserved for men, such as military factories making ammunition and repairing airplanes. Women showed they could be equally important in the labor market, which supported their claim for equal political rights. In 1928, the *Equal Franchise Act* gave women in the United Kingdom universal suffrage at the age of twenty-one, just like men. In the United States of America, the legal implementation of the feminist demands developed differently compared to the United Kingdom as decisions could be taken at state level,

independently of the reforms made by the federal government. Thus, individual states had already been granting full or partial suffrage to women throughout the 19th and early 20th century[23]. Ultimately, women obtained the right to vote on a federal level with the implementation of the *Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution* of 1920 (Sanders, 2004: 24, 27; McPherson, 2000: 208-209).

Overall, first wave feminists focused mainly on white middle class women, the lower classes were rarely involved. Furthermore, this first wave was characterized by personal activism. Feminist theory was as good as unavailable; the movement was mainly politically driven. The participants were mostly individuals campaigning for a particular cause. Despite the existence of women's associations, there was no fight for general changes in society, a goal which would only be aspired by the second wave feminists. Nevertheless, their actions brought the female issue to the general public's attention, and managed to bring about political changes that marked a milestone in women's history (Sanders, 2004: 27-28).

2. Early and First Wave Feminism in Mexico

Mexican history has known famous women who are symbols of early female resistance. One of the most important figures is undoubtedly the autodidact poet and writer, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648/51-1695), a religious of the Saint Jerome Convent of Mexico City who through self-teaching, and notwithstanding the opposition and prohibitions, dedicated her entire life to study. Through her writings Sor Juana fought for equal treatment of men and women in colonial Mexico, and for the education of girls. Nowadays, Sor Juana is considered one of the first Mexican feminists, and she is recognized as one of the great female figures of national history. In 17th century Mexico, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was however an exception; with her extraordinary perception of gender relations she was far ahead of her time.

During the War for Independence (1810-1821) Mexico freed itself from colonial Spanish rule. Some women actively participated in the struggles; a few even achieved fame on the side of the insurgents. Most notable were Josefa '*la corregidora*' Ortiz de Domínguez (1773-1829), Gertrudis Bocanegra (1765-1818), and Leona Vicario (1789-1842), who became national heroes[24]. Despite their involvement in the struggle for independence, women were excluded from citizenship in the Mexican Constitution of 1824. This exclusion was not questioned and considered as something very natural.

[23] The state of Wyoming was the first state to grant female suffrage in 1869.

[24] On women during Mexican Independence War, see for example: S. ALANIZ (2009), *Mujeres por la independencia, 1810-1821*, Mexico: Editorial Lectorum; D. BUGEDA and J. M. RAMÍREZ VÉLEZ (2010), *Mujeres insurgentes*, Mexico: Senado de la República LXI Legislatura, Siglo Veintiuno Editores; G. MOLINA ENRÍQUEZ and C. LUGO HUBP (2009), *Mujeres en la historia, historias de mujeres. Una revisión de la historia de México a través de la participación de las mujeres. Época antigua-México 1950*, Mexico: Ediciones Salsipuedes.

But, compared to other legislations of that time, Mexican laws regarding the rights of women were very similar to those of other Western countries (Arrom, 1981: 496-498).

A few liberals supported female education, but because of the political struggles in the first years after the Independence, little changed in this period. Besides a few initiatives of religious orders, female education was not formally organized by the Mexican state. It would not be until 1869 that the first secondary school for girls would open in Mexico City. The following years, similar schools were set up in the province (Macías, 2002: 26).

In the years before the Mexican Revolution, middle class women, mostly teachers, journalists, and writers, participated in ongoing political debates, and published feminist and politically inspired magazines, such as *La Mujer Mexicana* (1904-1908) and *La Mujer Moderna* (Lau, 1995). Their main topics of interest were female education, a single sexual moral, legal equality, and equal wages.

During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), women again took part in action[25]. Famous figures were for example Carmen Serdán Alatriste[26] (1875-1948), Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza[27] (1875-1942), Dolores Jiménez y Muro[28] (1848-1925), and Hermila Galindo de Topete[29] (1896-1954). Middle class women participated in the Revolution in different ways: they donated funds, clandestinely bought arms and ammunition, and transmitted information to the revolutionaries. Women of the lower classes had virtually no other choice but to take part in the action. Soldiers were often accompanied by women who cooked, washed their clothes, and took care of the injured soldiers: the

[25] For more on women during the Mexican Revolution: B. HERNÁNDEZ Y LAZO and R. RINCÓN HUAROTA (eds.) (1992), *Las mujeres en la Revolución Mexicana. Biografías de mujeres revolucionarias*, Mexico: INHERM; A. LAU JAIVEN (1995), "Las mujeres en la revolución mexicana. Un punto de vista historiográfico", in: *Secuencia. Nueva Epoca*, 33, p. 85-103; A. LAU JAIVEN (2011), "Mujeres, feminismo y sufragio en los años veinte", in: LAU JAIVEN A. and ESPINOSA DAMIÁN G. (eds.) (2011), *Un fantasma recorre el siglo. Luchas feministas en México 1910-2010*, Mexico: UAM-Xochimilco, p. 59-94.

[26] Carmen Serdán Alatriste would have fired the first shot of the Revolution.

[27] Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza was a teacher, journalist, feminist, and one of Mexico's first suffragists. She actively participated during the Revolution, by developing the Plan de Ayala, among others. She also launched numerous feminist and political magazines. For more on Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza: A. LAU JAIVEN (2005), "La participación de las mujeres en la Revolución Mexicana: Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza (1875-1942)", in: *Diálogos Revista Electrónica de Historia*, 5: 1-2, 2005, p. 1-32.

[28] Dolores Jiménez y Muro was a teacher, poet, social activist, and journalist. She was one of the editors of the feminist magazine *La Mujer Mexicana*, and one of the presidents of the women's club *Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*. She developed several proposals for far-reaching social reforms for the revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata. In 1911, she was one of the principal authors of the political and social Plan de Tacubaya, and of the prologue of the Plan de Ayala.

[29] Hermila Galindo de Topete founded the feminist magazine *La Mujer Moderna*. She was sent by Carranza to participate in the feminist congress of 1916 in Yucatan, and organized several revolutionary clubs in various states. In 1952, after a few earlier failed attempts, she became the first elected woman in the Mexican federal Congress.

renowned *soldaderas*[30]. Although men and women fought side by side, female participation during the Revolution had little effect on the feminist cause.

Women only started to ask for female suffrage from the Mexican Revolution on. It can be noted that this is later than in the United Kingdom and the United States. One of the reasons was that effective suffrage in itself had not been possible during the regime of Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915), neither for women, nor for men. The Mexican Revolution that followed his rule, was politically a highly unstable period, leaving little space for a feminist movement (Macías, 2002: 183-184).

The feminist movement in Western Europe and the United States of America was supported by men, mostly from progressive and liberal groups. In Mexico however, male allies of the female cause were almost non-existent. The feminist movement received very little governmental support, and the same was true for the press: the influential newspaper *Excélsior* for example, opposed feminism. After the Revolution certain voices argued for female participation in politics, but the general opinion opposed to this idea. Following the arguments used in other Western countries, it was believed that women should not participate in politics because they would neglect their domestic responsibilities, and thus destroy their homes. They were furthermore considered too emotional and irrational to vote properly. The aspect that was most feared in revolutionary circles was the strong influence of the Catholic Church on women, because their loyalty to this colonial institution could jeopardize the Revolution. Between 1870 and 1940, there was some support for female education, but always with the ultimate goal of limiting the power of the Church, which had until then monopolized education. The supporters of the feminist movement never wanted to change the patriarchal social structures. The main goal for women was still to become good housewives (Macías, 2002: 15, 184-185).

A few revolutionary leaders, such as two governors of Yucatán, general Salvador Alvarado (1915-1918) and Felipe Carrillo Puerto (1922-1924), supported the feminists and took measures in favor of women. The state of Yucatán, one of the places in Mexico where the political support for the Revolution was the strongest, became the ideal place to test some of the most radical ideas of social reform. But, these supporters of the female cause turned out to be too radical for the feminists of that period, and Alvarado and Carrillo were principally using the feminist debate to advance their own political agenda. Overall, they had a limited effect on the Mexican feminist movement (Macías, 2002: 77, 188).

[30] The *soldaderas* appeal to the imagination as an example of female heroism. Recently, several studies have been dedicated to the subject, for example: T. A., LINHARD (2005), *Fearless Women in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press; E., SALAS (2006), *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military : Myth and History*, Austin: University of Texas Press; E., PONIATOWSKA (2007), *Las soldaderas*, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

First wave Mexican feminism encountered several other problems, in the first place the *machismo* that characterized Mexican society. But there was also opposition of the Catholic Church; although the Catholic Church was in conflict with the Mexican national state, it was still highly influential and it strongly opposed the feminist movement. Internally, the disagreements within the movement itself slowed it down. And finally, many women had to combine their activism with a job and with their domestic work, limiting their availability (Macías, 2002: 14-15).

In this period, the feminist movement was concentrated in specific regions of the Republic, such as Yucatan, and larger cities, such as Mexico City and Guadalajara; it excluded indigenous women and women of the lower classes. Nevertheless, many initiatives were taken during this first wave of Mexican feminism. Numerous women organizations were founded, several congresses were organized, and there were many exchanges at an ideological level. Although the movement was not inclusive and its results were limited, Mexican feminists were already very active in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, in parallel with the development of the feminist movement in Western countries, but with its own specificities.

Due to the persistent opposition, Mexican women would have to wait until 1958 to vote for the first time for presidential elections and thus attain full political rights (Macías, 2002: 180-181).

B. Second Wave: A Feminism of Women's Liberation

A second feminist wave started in the 1960s. In this period, women pleaded for political as well as social and cultural equality. They opposed gender based discrimination in education, employment, and the domestic sphere, among others. There was a shift from a feminism of equal rights, to a feminism of women's liberation. The movement, predominantly focused on action, became an ideological and theoretically based movement.

1. Theoretical Base

The first works to inspire and influence the second wave feminists were *The Second Sex* (1949, first English translation in 1952), written by French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, and *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), by U.S.A. writer Betty Friedan. In these renowned works, the authors developed a theoretically founded critique against the subordinated position of women, and they argued in favor of far-reaching social and ideological changes.

Following Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist claim that 'existence precedes essence' – thus, that things and persons first exist, and only later get a meaning – Simone de Beauvoir stated that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman (Beauvoir, 1972: 295)". De Beauvoir was one of the first to put forward that it is not biology that defines what a women is, but society. In male-dominated cultures women are defined in relation to men, and they are seen as 'the Other'. For de Beauvoir, this social construction of woman as 'the Other' is fundamental to women's oppression (Beauvoir, 1972).

In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan criticized the idea that women need to take care of their children and their household to find fulfilment. Like de Beauvoir, she pleaded for a general awareness-raising regarding the oppression of women (Friedan, 1972).

Inspired by de Beauvoir and Friedan, various authors in the late 1960s and 1970s started publishing feminist theoretical works, among others Kate Millett, Eva Figes, Shulamith Firestone, Germaine Greer, and Robin Morgan[31]. Kate Millett proposed a broadening of the term 'patriarchy'. Traditionally, patriarchy referred to the dominant position of an elder male figure within a traditional kinship structure. Millett extended this definition to an institutionalized system of oppression of all women by all men. She also pointed out that the existing oppression is primarily maintained through ideological control (Millet, 1969). Most of these writers tried to situate the oppression in a social and economic context, and in a historical and cultural perspective. They erased undeniable differences, but their goal was to show the universality of patriarchal oppression (Thornham, 2004: 36-38).

Following the growing interest in the theoretical debate regarding the position of women, feminist ideology was slowly adopted by scholars in different fields of academia, such as sociology, anthropology, literature, history, etcetera. These scholars recognized that research had suffered from a very strong male bias; most research focused on male activities, making women invisible. Furthermore, the majority of researchers were male themselves and approached the studied subjects from a male perspective. In the 1970s, universities started offering specific courses and creating departments for Women Studies. In these departments feminist theories could be developed and the existing male bias was tackled.

[31] For example: K. MILLETT (1969), *Sexual Politics*, New York: Doubleday; E. FIGES (1970), *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society*, London: Macmillan; S. FIRESTONE (1970), *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, New York: Morrow; G. GREER (1970), *The Female Eunuch*, London: MacGibbon & Kee; R. MORGAN (1970), *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, New York: Random House.

2. Second Wave Activism in the West

Second wave feminism was not only about theory. The 1960s and 1970s were politically and ideologically turbulent decades. The never-ending Vietnam War brought about demonstrations for peace. Cultural movements, such as the hippie movement, were very popular. The younger generations opposed conformity and conservative society, and many protest groups were created for freedom and equality. In 1968, the activism also resulted in numerous student revolts in countries all over the world. The spirit of liberation and the theories on class and capitalism also influenced the ideas of young women on gender (Bradley, 2008: 33-35). In many countries, feminist activist groups were founded.

The demands of second-wave feminism differed from those of first-wave activists. The main goals were now centered on sexual freedom for women and the right to control their own bodies, including, among others, the legalization of birth control and abortion, and the creation of legal instruments against domestic violence and sexual assault. In the economic sphere, the claim of 'equal pay for equal work' remained, but this was extended to the recognition of traditional female activities, asking thus for 'equal pay for work of equal value'. On a domestic level, feminists called for increased male participation in household chores and childcare (McPherson, 2000: 209).

At international level, the United Nations declared 1975 'International Women's Year', and organized the first UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City. In 1979, the General Assembly of the UN adopted the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) (UN, 1979). The decade from 1975 to 1985 was named 'International Women's Decade'. This international acknowledgement of the precarious position of women fostered a growing consciousness among women, and influenced feminist movements around the world (Kurian, 2004: 71). It also stimulated worldwide research on women (Chant & Craske, 2007: 42-43). Three other world conferences on women would follow, in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995).

Second wave feminism tried to unite women and create one 'sisterhood'. However, there were many theoretical differences and conflicts, and some groups, such as working class women and Black Feminists, were excluded. Much of the movement's political strength dwindled because of these internal differences (Thornham, 2004: 41-42).

3. Historical Feminism in Mexico

After obtaining equal political rights in 1958, a second feminist wave also started in Mexico. The writer Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974) was one of the first Mexican intellectuals to actively support the feminist cause. Her poetry and literary work were explicitly feminist, but the discourse she gave on the 15th of February 1971 at the Museo Nacional de Antropología on International Women's Day, was particularly important as it was one of the first times that, the subordination of Mexican women was publicly denounced at a national level (Castellanos, 1995: 22).

Mexican feminism emerged in the context of the social movements of 1968. It was influenced by events in other parts of the world, such as the French protests in May 1968, the Cuban revolution, the hippie movement, the feminist movement in the U.S.A., etcetera, but also by the Mexican social movement. Nevertheless, so-called historical feminism only had a limited group of participants, defined by their social, cultural, and political position. It mostly consisted of middle class women from university milieus and left-wing democrats, who seem to have had very little connections with other social movements of that period (González, 2001; Lamas, 1994; Lau, 1987 & 2000; Espinosa Damián, 2009: 58-60).

Different types of organizations were founded in the 1970s[32]. Feminists became aware that the problems they were facing were not only personal, but reflected a social state of being, and thus political action was needed. But, internal conflicts and leadership problems prevented the organizations from moving on. According to Marta Lamas, one of the main problems of the Mexican feminist movement of the 1970s was that the participants themselves, mostly educated urban middle-class women, did not need the movement to improve their situation: their involvement was rather a matter of conviction and not necessity (Lamas, 1994: 147). Furthermore, the goals of historical feminism were limited; they mainly fought for voluntary motherhood and the right to abort, and for the condemnation of violence against women (Espinosa Damián, 2009: 74).

[32] On these organizations, see for example: ESPINOSA (2009: 61-64), GONZÁLEZ (2001: 85-168), and LAU (1987: 75-138).

C. Third Wave: Against Universal Womanhood

Already during the second wave, the generally accepted definition of femininity, and the supposed universality of the position of women were increasingly challenged. Anthropological research had shown that there are no universal dichotomies between men and women; social structures and gender relations differ depending on the historical and cultural context (Joyce, 2000: 23).

1. Postcolonial and Postmodern Critiques

In the 1980s and 1990s, following postcolonial theorists such as Franz Fanon (1952), Albert Memmi (1957), Edward Said (1978), and Homi Bhabha (1983; 1994), feminist movements in non-western countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, started criticizing the Western white middle-class bias in feminism. They claimed that the prevalent definition of what a women is and what she needs, did not apply to women all over the world. Furthermore, white feminism had constructed an image of the 'Third World woman' that did not correspond to reality, and was experienced as a new form of suppression. They rejected the typically Western points of view, and started asking new pertinent questions about the relation between gender and imperialism, colonialism, and race. This gave this new feminist strand the name of postcolonial feminism. Feminists from cultural minorities in Western societies also started to challenge the class-based analyses which excluded them (McPherson, 2000: 209). Indigenous and First Nation feminists took a stand in the theoretical discourse, and showed that they had specific needs. Among the main postcolonial feminist authors are Chandra Talpade Mohanty, with her essay "Under Western Eyes" (1984), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, with her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), and Trinh T. Minh-ha with her work *Woman, Native, Other. Writing postcoloniality and feminism* (1989). In the context of this work, postcolonial theory offers important points of view that are discussed in the theoretical chapter.

The realization that there was no 'universal womanhood' led to a third feminist wave: postmodern feminism. Modernism always considered that societies were structured, and therefore could be analyzed, whereas postmodernism rejected the grand theories and metanarratives. According to postmodernist theorists, social science could merely aspire to describe particular social processes within their specific context (Bradley, 2008: 64).

Third wave feminism was mainly influenced by postmodern and post-structuralist theorists, such as Jacques Derrida (deconstructivism), and Jacques Lacan (psychoanalysis). The work of Michel Foucault was especially important, because of his emphasis on the material body, and the discourses of power. He pointed out how theorists built dominant discourses, and thus created fixed identities.

Victorian psychologists created, for example, the image of 'the hysterical woman'. This discourse influenced the way people thought about the capacities of women, and about gender relations. Following these ideas, postmodern feminist theorists focused on how the categories of 'man' and 'woman' are culturally constructed through discourse (Bradley, 2008: 64-66; Maynard, 2005: 34).

Other minority groups also opposed the universality of given concepts, and adopted the discourse approach. Lesbian feminists, such as Judith Butler[33], drew on the works of Foucault and Lacan to develop a 'queer' theory. Butler claims that the social construction of gender can also differ within the same cultural society. According to Butler, gender is not connected to anatomy, therefore there can be more than two genders (Maynard, 2005: 34).

Thus, contrary to second wave feminists, one of the characteristics of third wave feminism is the acceptance of variety within feminism. Visweswaran puts it this way:

> "If second wave feminists saw women as fundamentally equal in their subordination, third wave feminists insist on the inequality of women's subordination based upon the particular location of different communities in racial/class formations or heterosexual economies (Visweswaran, 1997: 596)."

This opening up of the movement paved the way for alternative forms of feminism, such as indigenous feminism.

2. The United Nations and Women

At an international policy level, the 1985 *World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace* in Nairobi (the Third World Conference on Women), has been seen as the birth of global feminism. The conference acknowledged that the goals of the 1975 Second World Conference on Women in Mexico City had not been reached. The participating governments declared that there was a need to see all issues as women's issues too (UN, 2000a).

In 1995, the United Nations organized the *Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace* in Beijing. The conference had a large number of participants, including more than 2.100 NGOs form around the world and representatives of 189 governments (UN, 1997b). The meeting encouraged the empowerment and participation of women in the decision-making process at a global level (Bradley, 2008: 201). Among the main issues discussed were the advancement and empowerment of women in relation to women's human rights, women and

[33] For example: J. BUTLER (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York & London: Routledge.

poverty, women and decision-making, the girl-child, and violence against women. The conference participants stressed that the advancement of women is indispensable for the development of any society as a whole. The gender perspective is highly necessary in the search for sustainable development. The 1995 Beijing Conference resulted in the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. The Beijing Declaration wanted to ensure that the gender perspective was implemented in national, regional, and international programs and policy making. The Platform went beyond the 1985 Nairobi Conference, declaring that women's rights were human rights. The participants committed to take action in order for these rights to be guaranteed. (UN, 2011a).

In the year 2000, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. This resolution "urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional, and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict (UN, 2000b; art.1)".

The United Nations has given special attention to the eradication of violence against women. In 1993, the General Assembly adopted the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (UN, 1993). In 2007, the theme of the International Women's Day was "Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls". In 2008, the Secretary-General's Global Campaign was launched, entitled: "UNiTE to End Violence Against Women"[34]. In 2014, UN Women initiated the HeForShe campaign, a solidarity campaign to include men in the fight for gender equality[35].

All of these actions reveal an international political will to address gender inequality at the highest levels. However, they had varying results at a national level. The commitment at international level often lost its impetus when reaching national and local policy makers, which, as we will see throughout this study, has certainly been true for Mexico.

3. Popular and Civil Feminism in Mexico

After the 1960s, Mexico suffered from an economic and social depression: the GNP dropped, the population was growing, there was an urgent need for the attribution of land, unemployment rates were going up rapidly, and public resources were lacking. As a result, new left-wing, social, political, and union movements became active. In the context of these popular movements, new women's organizations emerged, influenced by feminist ideology and new left-wing discourse. Women active in the popular movements began to realize that their grieves were not solely related to class, but also to gender, and that the needs of women were no priority for their mixed unions and popular

[34] For more information: http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/index.shtml
[35] For more information: http://heforshe.org/; http://www.unwomen.org/

associations (Espinosa Damián, 2009: 94). Thus, based on the existing leftist structures and political networks, organizations were created of female factory workers, female farmers, and urban women.

The earthquake of September 1985 gave a new impulse to popular feminism, especially in Mexico City[36]. A large number of new popular organizations were founded to support the victims, among others a seamstresses' union that would come up for these workers' rights. National actions for female farmers turned out to be difficult to realize, but initiatives were taken at a local level, mainly under impulse of NGOs, academic groups, and social policy programs such as *Progresa* and *Oportunidades*. In an urban context, local neighborhood and resident associations played an important role in the emancipation of women, as they gave housewives the opportunity to participate as full citizens in the public space (Espinosa Damián, 2009: 108, 114-117, 129).

At the beginning of the 1980s, there were only a few civil organizations associated with the popular movements in Mexico, but their role as support groups was very important and highly valued. Women's organizations active within civil feminism had performed community and educational work, and from this experience they developed specific methodologies. NGOs often imposed their feminist views on women's organizations, but the civil feminists wanted to create their own discourse based on a dialogue with women (Espinosa Damián, 2009: 153-154, 159-165, 173).

Thus, a large variety of women's organizations were created in the different spheres of Mexican society. Both popular and civil feminists were able to participate at regional and international meetings. Although it was difficult to organize at these levels, it gave these women visibility and brought them in contact with women in similar situations with whom they could exchange experiences.

4. Indigenous Feminism in Mexico

In the evolution of Mexican feminism, indigenous women were also able to conquer spaces and to speak up about their specific needs. Two important events stimulated the emergence of a female indigenous movement: the movement of *500 Años de Resistencia Indígena, Negra y Popular* in 1992 – a movement that rose from the *Encuentro de Dos Mundos: 1492-1992* –, and the uprising of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in 1994. These events found their origin in the peasant and popular revolts after 1968 in the context of the political and economic crisis.

[36] For more information on the earthquake of 1985: M. T. CAMARILLO (ed.) (1987), *Memoria periodística del terremoto (19 de septiembre - 10 de octubre 1985)*, Mexico: UNAM; M. FERNÁNDEZ (1990), *Ciudad rota: la ciudad de México después del sismo*, Mexico: UNAM; G. LOAEZA et al. (2005), *Terremoto. Ausentes/Presentes, 20 años después*, Mexico: Planeta.

The Mexican government reduced the structural resources for agriculture, and privatized companies supporting rural farmers. The 1994 *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) forced Mexican farmers to face unequal competition with U.S.A. farmers who had access to considerably more resources. At a social level, the government chose for assistance policies. These policies did not resolve the situations of poverty for rural and indigenous peoples. They emphasized the inequalities, and showed how discrimination based on class and race had become natural in Mexico. The general discontent resulted in a struggle of the peasant and popular movement against the existing political structures, and against the omnipresent clientelism and paternalism (Espinosa Damián, 2010: 86-87).

The uprising of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional on the 1st of January 1994 was a turning point for the indigenous movement. The main demands of the Mexican indigenous movement were the observance of constitutional rights and of their specific indigenous rights, and free determination and autonomy of indigenous peoples.

Together with the Zapatista uprising, a movement of indigenous women emerged. These women supported the claim of autonomy based on ethnicity and culture of the Zapatista movement, but in addition, they opposed the subordination and discrimination they experienced as women. However, the development of the indigenous feminist movement was not the result of the Zapatista uprising, because it started earlier. It was rooted in the rural struggles of popular feminism. The indigenous feminist movement was also influenced by the ideas of historical and civil feminism. But, none of these feminist groups included a specific ethnic component in their claims; therefore, there was a need for a movement addressing both ethnicity and gender (Espinosa Damián, 2009: 232-233). An organization already active for women before the Zapatista uprising is, for example, Ser Mixe (Servicios del pueblo Mixe). This mixed indigenous organization was created in 1988 in Oaxaca for *Ayuuk* peoples (Mixe), first offering programs concerning alimentation and nutrition, and later also on children's health, reproductive health, the environment, savings and credit. In addition, Ser Mixe started to support the group Xaam të'ëxy, created in 1983 by Mixe women of the community of Santa María Tlahuitoltepec. This group was one of the first indigenous women's organizations in the region (Robles, personal communication, 2011). The rise of an indigenous feminist movement was thus not only linked to the political climate, but also the result of an ongoing evolution and of the agency of indigenous women themselves.

Already on the 8th of March 1993, nine months before the uprising, the EZLN had accepted the *Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres* (see infra). This law was a unifying factor for indigenous women all over Mexico. Indigenous women demanded rights equal to men at all levels of society, politically, economically, as well as socially, including regulations against gender based violence.

Revolutionary Law of Women (EZLN, 1993)[37].

In their just struggle for the liberation of our people, the EZLN incorporates women in the revolutionary struggle regardless of race, creed, color or political affiliation, with the only requirement to endorse the demands of the exploited people and their commitment to comply and enforce the laws and regulations of the revolution. Moreover, taking into account the situation of working women in Mexico, their just demands for equality and justice are incorporated in the following Revolutionary Law of Women:

First.- Women, regardless of race, creed, color or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in the place and to an extent determined by their willingness and ability.

Second.- Women have the right to work and receive a fair wage.

Third.- Women have the right to decide the number of children they want and will care for.

Fourth.- Women have the right to participate in the affairs of the community and take up a *cargo* if they are freely and democratically elected.

Fifth.- Women and their children are entitled to PRIMARY CARE regarding their health and nutrition.

Sixth.- Women have the right to education.

[37] Original:
Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres (EZLN, 1993)

En su justa lucha por la liberación de nuestro pueblo, el EZLN incorpora a las mujeres en la lucha revolucionaria sin importar su raza, credo, color o filiación política, con el único requisito de hacer suyas las demandas del pueblo explotado y su compromiso a cumplir y hacer cumplir las leyes y reglamentos de la revolución. Además, tomando en cuenta la situación de la mujer trabajadora en México, se incorporan sus justas demandas de igualdad y justicia en la siguiente LEY REVOLUCIONARIA DE MUJERES:

Primero.- Las mujeres, sin importar su raza, credo, color o filiación política, tienen derecho a participar en la lucha revolucionaria en el lugar y grado que su voluntad y capacidad determinen.
Segundo.- Las mujeres tienen derecho a trabajar y recibir un salario justo.
Tercero.- Las mujeres tienen derecho a decidir el número de hijos que pueden tener y cuidar.
Cuarto.- Las mujeres tienen derecho a participar en los asuntos de la comunidad y tener cargo si son elegidas libre y democráticamente.
Quinto.- Las mujeres y sus hijos tienen derecho a ATENCION PRIMARIA en su salud y alimentación.
Sexto.- Las mujeres tienen derecho a la educación.
Séptimo.- Las mujeres tienen derecho a elegir su pareja y a no ser obligadas por la fuerza a contraer matrimonio.
Octavo.- Ninguna mujer podrá ser golpeada o maltratada físicamente ni por familiares ni por extraños. Los delitos de intento de violación o violación serán castigados severamente.
Noveno.- Las mujeres podrán ocupar cargos de dirección en la organización y tener grados militares en las fuerzas armadas revolucionarias.
Décimo.- Las mujeres tendrán todos los derechos y obligaciones que señalan las leyes y reglamentos revolucionarios.

Seventh.- Women have the right to choose their partner and not be compelled by force to marry.

Eighth.- No woman shall be beaten or physically abused neither by family members nor strangers. Crimes of rape or attempted rape will be severely punished.

Ninth.- Women may hold positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.

Tenth.- Women will have all the rights and obligations contained in the revolutionary laws and regulations.

After the Zapatista uprising of January 1994, indigenous women organized an increasing number of meetings, both at a local, regional, and national level. In addition, they created networks of indigenous women. In Oaxaca for example, Ser Mixe developed a network of Mixe women (Red de Mujeres Mixes). Throughout the country, indigenous women organized and used the *Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres* as a reference for their actions. The creation of the Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas (Conami) in 1997, which united indigenous women's associations from fourteen Mexican states, was an important achievement (Robles, personal communication, 2011; Espinosa Damián, 2009: 255-258; Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 127-129).

The activism of Zapatista women inspired other indigenous women throughout the country to participate in social movements and demand equal rights. But it also has to be pointed out that many of the participants in these meetings were women with several years of experience in local and regional cooperatives and organizations; these indigenous women were not beginners in this field, they had been engaged for a long time but were now offered new platforms where they could reinforce and improve their network. Through the different meetings and initiatives women got more opportunities to share their experiences at different levels (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 143).

The indigenous feminists developed their own discourse, and criticized both modernity and tradition, as both worlds enabled their subordination. They fought for the autonomy of their communities, but extended their fight to their individual and personal autonomy, and to the autonomy of their bodies (Espinosa Damián, 2009: 233-234). Following the impetus of the Zapatista rebellion, they were able to conquer a variety of formal and informal channels to successfully spread their message. Women did not only take up arms within the EZLN, they also put up actions within their communities.

Yet the position of indigenous feminists has been a difficult one. First, the indigenous women's movement encountered resistance within the mixed indigenous movement. Female indigenous

activists, such as Martha Sánchez (Amuzga of Guerrero), Sofía Robles (Mixe of Oaxaca)[38], Cándida Jiménez (Mixe of Oaxaca), and Margarita Gutiérrez (Hñahñu of Hidalgo), recall their difficulties to actively participate and have a voice within their indigenous organizations. They experienced gender discrimination from their male comrades. Furthermore, these women were seen as traitors for exposing 'private' gender problems in their communities. As the women also approached the traditional normative system of '*usos y costumbres*' from a critical point of view, their male companions experienced this as betrayal, and accused them of weakening the movement (Sánchez Néstor, 2003: 305; Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 131).

In a press release of the 26th of January 1994, *Subcomandante* Marcos illustrates the internal struggles women had to face to get the *Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres* accepted:

> "That is the truth: the first EZLN uprising was in March 1993 and it was led by the Zapatista women (Subcomandante Marcos, 1994)[39]."

Furthermore, indigenous feminists have also experienced conflicts with non-indigenous feminists. Although indigenous feminists are fighting for equality too, their demands are not entirely the same. Their struggle is always within the context of their claims for collective cultural rights. They look for a feminism that works within their own traditional context. The non-indigenous feminists on the other hand, have often acted in a very paternalistic way, trying to impose their views on gender relations, and forcing indigenous women to question their traditions. They do not seem to understand indigenous women live in a different cultural context and not necessarily share the same views and priorities. The strongest conflicts are in relation to sexuality and reproductive rights. For example, the decriminalization of abortion is an important topic for non-indigenous feminists, but for indigenous feminists abortion is a topic that is not up for discussion (Rovira, 1999: 29). In this context, Western feminism has shown its Western bias. Indigenous women should be able to define their own priorities without being forced into certain directions. It is part of the autonomy they demand. There is no need for cultural relativism either, but an equal relationship is necessary between the different strands of feminism in which there is an exchange of ideas and not an imposition of opinions.

The criticism voiced by indigenous women against a number of harmful traditions, has been used by opponents to impeach the indigenous movement. The subordinate position of indigenous women is seen as proof that indigenous communities are unwilling to adapt, and are stubbornly stuck in rigid and conservative traditions.

[38] Sofía Robles is of Zapotec origin. However, since she married a Mixe she has primarily been active in the Mixe movement.
[39] Original: "Esa es la verdad: el primer alzamiento del EZLN fue en marzo de 1993 y lo encabezaron las mujeres zapatistas."

It is true that it has been difficult for indigenous women to conquer spaces. In 2001, indigenous peoples organized the *Marcha del Color de la Tierra* to support the *Ley de la Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación* on indigenous rights and culture (known as the *Ley Cocopa*). At the simultaneously held second *Congreso Nacional Indígena*, women experienced resistance from the male indigenous leaders in the organization of a Women's Table. The Zapatista *comandanta* Esther criticized this resistance in her renowned speech at the National Congress on the 28th of March 2001. Her speech was revolutionary in the sense that she, an indigenous person and woman, spoke on behalf of the EZLN at the Mexican National Congress. The text also proved the high level of analysis indigenous women were capable of. In her speech, *comandanta* Esther refuted the allegations both of non-indigenous critics and critics within the indigenous movement. She was very critical, both of the sexism of traditional indigenous culture and racism in Mexican society. Feminists had objected that the *Ley Cocopa* marginalized indigenous women; they worried women would be suppressed if the traditional '*usos y costumbres'* were implemented. *Comandanta* Esther, however, supported the law, and stated it was the current situation that was marginalizing women, and that the law would make it possible for women to take matters in their own hands. She, as many other female indigenous activists before her, stated that indigenous women knew which uses and customs were good and which ones were bad. In her speech she thus criticized the paternalistic treatment of indigenous women. She also emphasized that the struggles of indigenous feminists and the fight of the indigenous movement are not mutually exclusive (EZLN, 2001).

Indigenous women are questioning both modernity and tradition. They refuse to believe they have to change through modernity or remain the same because of tradition. One of their statements is: "You can remain the same while changing, and change while remaining the same[40]" (Hernández Castillo, 2001: 212). For Aída Hernández Castillo, indigenous feminism is a bridge between the indigenous movement that does not recognize its own sexist posture, and the feminist movement that does not recognize its ethnocentric approach (Hernández Castillo, 2001: 207).

Unfortunately, the *Ley Cocopa* was not approved by Congress. This caused tension within the indigenous movement in general, and resulted in the weakening of the movement. The women's movement also lost some of its strength, but it continued to bring women from different organizations together, for example in the *Primera Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas de América* (2002), creating local groups such as the Coordinadora Guerrerense de Mujeres Indígenas (2004) or the Asamblea de Mujeres Indígenas de Oaxaca (2011). The initiatives have been diverse, with varying impact. But, it is an important achievement that all indigenous women's organizations have adopted

[40] Original: "Se puede permanecer cambiando y cambiar permaneciendo."

a certain degree of gender perspective in their discourses and actions, and that they have gained a lot of experience.

D. Conclusion

Mexican feminism developed in parallel with the feminist movement in Europe and the rest of North America, but it also had its own specific characteristics. Early on there were people in Mexico with very advanced ideas regarding women's rights. Feminists first claimed educational rights, then social rights. The demand for political rights came later, and it would take much longer to obtain them.

During the first feminist wave, the evolution of the feminist movement differed from one region to the other. The movement developed most in Yucatan, and in the larger cities, such as Mexico City and Guadalajara. Other parts of the Republic were much less influenced by the emerging feminism. First wave feminism was also primarily a movement of middle class women; indigenous women and women of the lower classes were excluded.

In general, there was a lot of opposition to the feminist movement, from the Catholic Church, the government, and public opinion. In addition, the movement was slowed down because of recurrent internal disagreements. Finally, the feminists were limited in their actions because they had to combine their activism with their day job and with their domestic tasks.

Nevertheless, numerous initiatives were taken by first wave feminists, women associations were founded and several conferences were organized. The movement was not inclusive, and its results were limited, but these initiatives show that Mexican feminists were already very active in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

Second and third wave Mexican feminism developed gradually, often pushed forward by specific events, such as the social movement of 1968, the earthquake of September 1985, and the uprising of the EZLN in 1994. These different contexts resulted in different main currents within Mexican feminism: historical, popular, civil, and indigenous feminism.

Mexican feminism has been active at different levels, but it has always struggled to be taken seriously, striving to convince all actors of the importance of its message. The persisting machismo in Mexican society has been an important obstacle, as well as the lack of governmental support, but also the resistance of the different mixed movements that accused feminists of dividing the general

social movement. Finally, internal debates and conflicts between the different feminist currents resulted in fragmented actions which ultimately weakened the movement.

For many years, Mexican feminism has been a struggle led by mestizo, middle class women. Only during the last decades, attention shifted to indigenous women because of their own interventions. It is important to point out that indigenous women had already started to organize themselves before the Zapatista uprising. They were partially influenced by the feminist movement, but they developed their own independent program, with their own priorities. This illustrates the agency of indigenous women. It also shows how indigenous women do not need 'saving' by other feminists. They have been very capable of organizing themselves, of developing a critical discourse in which they are not afraid to question their own culture, and of planning concrete actions.

For indigenous women, it has been a very important emancipation process. They have gained extensive experience and have taken own initiatives within different types of organizations, both at national and international level. Today, this experience allows them to speak up and to have a clear view of what they need to do to improve their own situation and that of their communities. But, as we will see further on, more spaces in mainstream Mexican society still need to open up for them to be heard at all levels of social, economic, political, cultural, and academic life.