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The Practice of Autonomy in the Age of Neoliberalism: Strategies from Indigenous Women's Organising in Mexico

MAYLEI BLACKWELL*

Abstract. Bridging the ways in which scholars have looked at the co-optation of both gender and cultural rights through neoliberal governance in Latin America, this article will examine how gender has been utilised by the state as a discourse of governmentality in order to regulate indigenous subjects. Moreover, the article will explore how indigenous women activists in Mexico are creating a *practice* of autonomy as a vital strategy to move beyond rights discourse and challenge the ways in which neoliberal states have selectively co-opted social movement demands. Through their grassroots forms of consultation, indigenous women activists shift the concept of autonomy as a right granted by the state to a practice of decolonisation that is part of everyday life and community sociality.

Keywords: indigenous women, autonomy, indigenous rights, Mexico, governmentality

Introduction

Globalisation, an often-elliptical reference to neoliberal economic policies, has brought about increasingly sophisticated forms of exploitation while at the same time facilitating new forms of resistance through the globalisation of human rights.¹ Those analysing state responses to the rise of indigenous and women's mobilisation in Latin America have observed that states, instead of

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¹ Alison Brysk, 'Introduction: Transnational Threats and Opportunities', in Brysk (ed.), *Globalization and Human Rights* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 1–18.

denying or repressing social movement demands, employ a strategy of selective co-option whereby a minimal recognition of rights leads to an increased role by the state in the constitution and regulation of identities through its administrative and technocratic power.² Instead of being seen as contradictory to neoliberalism, gender and cultural rights are increasingly being seen as part of neoliberal governmentality.³ The discourse of gender equity has been co-opted by successive elected governments in Latin America, leading Verónica Schild to argue that ‘Increasingly, the advancement of women’s rights – a political goal – is being transformed into a technical task that leaves unchallenged the exploitative capitalist relations that enable the successful global economic integration of countries in the region, and may even deepen the problem of the feminization of poverty.’⁴

This concern is echoed by scholars of indigenous rights movements who have analysed the perils of selective co-option and the ways in which the state has restricted indigenous demands for autonomy to cultural rights. Charles Hale argues that a minimal recognition of indigenous rights and the multi-cultural nature of Latin American nations may not challenge, but indeed may be part of, the cultural logic of neoliberalism. This policy, which he calls ‘neoliberal multiculturalism’, promotes increased cultural rights and limited indigenous autonomy as states roll back their social welfare policies and identity is managed through civil society and the increasingly bureaucratic logic of the state.⁵ While scholars have increasingly examined how demands for indigenous autonomy fit into the cultural logic of neoliberalism, and feminist scholars have critiqued the selective co-option of women’s movement demands, in this essay I will call attention to the ways in which indigenous claims have been engaged and managed by the neoliberal state through the discourse of gender. In fact, if we examine closely how the Mexican

² Verónica Schild, ‘New Subjects of Rights? Gendered Citizenship and the Contradictory Legacies of Social Movements in Latin America’, *Organization: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Organization, Theory and Society*, 4: 4 (1997), pp. 604–19; Charles R. Hale, ‘Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala’, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 34 (2002), pp. 485–524.

³ Charles R. Hale, ‘Neoliberal Multiculturalism: The Remaking of Cultural Rights and Racial Dominance in Central America’, *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 28: 1 (2005), pp. 10–28. This key challenge of Latin American social movements has been explored by feminist scholar Sonia Alvarez, who theorises the selective co-option of women’s rights discourse and the emergence of two distinct logics of organising that have emerged in the context of neoliberal governance, increased NGO-isation and the transnationalisation of social movements. See Sonia E. Alvarez, ‘Translating the Global: Effects of Transnational Organizing on Local Feminist Discourses and Practices in Latin America’, *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 1: 1 (2000), pp. 29–67.

⁴ Verónica Schild, ‘“Gender Equity” without Social Justice: Women’s Rights in the Neoliberal Age’, *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 34 (July/August 2000), p. 25.

⁵ Hale, ‘Neoliberal Multiculturalism’.

government has understood and denied indigenous claims, we see that the state's engagement has often revolved around the question of gender.

Given this 'perverse confluence' between a new form of citizenship claimed by social actors who emerged to fight for their right to have rights, and the state, which utilised the neoliberal strategy of scaling back its role as the guarantor of those rights, this essay explores the strategies deployed by indigenous women activists in Mexico to confront new forms of neoliberal governmentality.⁶ It unfolds through examples from three sites of political organising that follow a historical section contextualising the shift to neoliberal governance. The first example illustrates how gender was utilised by the state as a discourse of governmentality to regulate indigenous subjects. It focuses on how organised indigenous women's groups challenged the gendered logic of racism used by the Mexican government to co-opt women's rights in its arguments against indigenous autonomy – specifically in relation to indigenous law, commonly referred to as *usos y costumbres* (practices and customs) – in the 2001 congressional debate surrounding the Law on Indigenous Rights and Culture. The second example moves backward in time to outline a vibrant history of struggle for women's rights within the movement for indigenous autonomy of the 1990s and the subsequent decade. Indigenous women activists in Mexico shifted the political demand for indigenous autonomy from a discourse of rights to a daily life practice exercised within gendered forms of labour, politics and sociality, thereby generating a different form of belonging or cultural citizenship. By tracing this earlier organising, I demonstrate how indigenous women activists have reshaped the debate on autonomy through their own forms of grassroots consultation that focus on the gendered practices within communal and decision-making structures. This strategy moves from a concept of autonomy as a right granted by the state to a practice of decolonisation that is part of everyday life and community, which is a critical strategy given state recalcitrance. Finally, the third example examines how the participation of indigenous women in Mexico's growing civil society mobilisation, their demands against the state and economic order, and their insistence on women's human rights within their own communities

⁶ Evelina Dagnino, 'Citizenship and the Social in Contemporary Brazil', paper presented at the Claiming Citizenship in the Americas series organised by the Canada Research Chair in Citizenship and Governance, University of Montreal, 4–5 Nov. 2005. The 'right to have rights' was invoked in 1994 both by Dagnino in 'Os movimentos sociais e a emergência de uma nova noção de cidadania', in Dagnino (ed.), *Os anos 90: política e sociedade no Brasil* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994), and by the Zapatistas. See, for example, Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). For an earlier formulation of the right to have rights, see Hannah Arendt, 'The Perplexities of the Rights of Man', in Peter Baehr (ed.), *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Viking, 2000), pp. 31–45, which was originally a chapter in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1973).

has, for the first time, challenged the ways in which others attempt to speak for them. As neoliberal forms of governance gain predominance in Latin America, the maintenance and construction of political subjectivities are increasingly being regulated through a growing NGO sector, which carries out social service provision that is no longer provided by the state.⁷ This example illustrates how even potential allies can perpetuate racial/gendered stereotypes and how indigenous rights activists are responding to the increasing power that NGOs have to define, represent and regulate their identities and cultural norms.

This essay is grounded in a critical ethnography of social movements that blends cultures of politics/politics of cultures approaches with feminist ethnography and activist research.⁸ My analysis draws upon participant observations and oral histories from members of the Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas (National Coordinator of Indigenous Women, CONAMI),⁹ a national indigenous women's organisation that I have accompanied since 1998.¹⁰ Formed as a national network at the First National Gathering of

⁷ For an important analysis on the NGO-isation of Latin America, see Sonia E. Alvarez, 'Latin American Feminisms "Go Global": Trends of the 1990s and Challenges for the New Millennium', in Sonia E. Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino and Arturo Escobar (eds.), *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures: Revisioning Latin American Social Movements* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 293–324; and for an early critique of the increased role of NGOs, see Jael Silliman, 'Expanding Civil Society, Shrinking Political Spaces: The Case of Women's Non-Governmental Organizations', in Jael Silliman and Ynestra King (eds.), *Dangerous Intersections: Feminist Perspectives on Population, Environment, and Development* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1999), pp. 133–62. There is a wide range of views on the negative role of NGOs; see, for example, James Petras, 'Imperialism and NGOs in Latin America – Non-Governmental Organizations', *Monthly Review*, 7 (December 1997), pp. 10–28.

⁸ Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar (eds.), *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures*. My social movement ethnography explores how these ideas and discourses of autonomy are being created and practised within a national organisation, and while I highlight the way in which these developments transform daily life, there is work that focuses solely on the local impact of such participation. See, for example, chapters by Stephen, Speed, Forbis and Zylberberg in Shannon Speed, Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo and Lynn M. Stephen (eds.), *Dissident Women: Gender and Cultural Politics in Chiapas* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 2006); and Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo (ed.), *Etnografías e historias de resistencia: mujeres indígenas, procesos organizativos, y nuevas identidades políticas* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género, 2008).

⁹ Archival research, ethnographic fieldwork and oral histories with over a dozen women in the leadership of the indigenous women's movement in Mexico were conducted between 1998 and 2005 for this essay. To understand the long-term impact of their initial and continued social movement participation on the lives and communities of key members, I draw upon follow-up interviews that I conducted with several leaders between 2009 and 2012. In addition, I have been attending local, national, regional, continental and international forums organised by the CONAMI and its members since 1998.

¹⁰ This network includes indigenous women activists who participate in mixed gender indigenous and peasant organisations such as 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance in Guerrero, the Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Zona Norte del Istmo (Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus, UCIZONI) and Servicios

Indigenous Women in Oaxaca in 1997, the CONAMI has called for indigenous autonomy based on *usos y costumbres*, indigenous jurisprudence and self-governance, while at the same time critiquing and transforming those practices in relationship to its own gendered understanding of power.

The Crossroads of Rights Discourse and Neoliberal Governmentality

Neoliberal reforms have had a profound and detrimental impact on indigenous communities throughout Mexico, leading to displacement, migration and, ultimately, increased marginalisation. In the early 1990s, amidst the rise of indigenous movements united for the first time across the continent against the 1992 Quincentenary Celebration of Columbus' so-called discovery of the Americas, Mexico adopted policy measures that addressed indigenous peoples and recognised the pluricultural nature of the nation. In 1990, surprising many, Mexico was the second country in the world and the first in Latin America to ratify Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the UN International Labour Organization (ILO), a critical tool of indigenous social movements internationally because it recognises the collective economic, cultural, social and political rights of indigenous peoples. While it was purportedly positive in nature, many sceptics saw the signing of Convention 169, and Mexico's subsequent passage of Article 4 of its Constitution in 1992, as a move to address mounting international pressure without real meaningful reform during a critical juncture in the alignment of Mexico to a hemispheric neoliberal agenda aimed at creating a context for global capital and free trade. For example, in preparation for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), then-president Salinas de Gortari dismantled the *ejido* system, a collective land tenure arrangement that was one of the remaining victories of the Mexican Revolution, undercutting rural and indigenous farmers' ability to survive.¹¹ On the one hand, for the first time in

del Pueblo Mixe (Services of the Mixe People, SER), both from Oaxaca, indigenous rights organisations in Jalisco and Veracruz and weavers' collectives in Chiapas. In addition, a growing number of activists come from local indigenous women's organisations such as Erandi (Dawn, a P'urhépecha women's group in Michoacán), Casa de Mujer Indígena (Indigenous Women's House, CAMI) in Cuetzalan, Puebla, and the growing number of state-wide indigenous women's organisations in Oaxaca and Guerrero. As a political formation, members of the CONAMI have participated in both the women's commissions of the Congreso Nacional Indígena (National Indigenous Congress, CNI) and the Asamblea Nacional Indígena Plural por la Autonomía (National Plural Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy, ANIPA), as well as in leadership positions of ANIPA.

¹¹ This impacted some 61 per cent of the land within indigenous communities, according to Procuraduría Agraria (Agrarian Ombudsman), 'Propiedad de la tierra y población indígena', *Estudios Agrarios*, 14 (Jan.–April 2000), pp. 123–47, cited in Luis Hernández Navarro and Laura Carlsen, 'Indigenous Rights: The Battle for Constitutional Reform in Mexico', in

Mexico's history, Article 4 (which is now Article 2, after being renumbered) recognised the pluricultural nature of Mexico as a nation, and indigenous peoples gained cultural rights surrounding the protection of their own languages, customs and traditional practices, and forms of social organisation. On the other hand, Article 4 lacked enforcement mechanisms and failed to recognise the collective rights of indigenous peoples, thereby binding indigenous rights to a cultural rights frame whose meaning and parameters are determined by the state, rather than recognising the collective rights to self-determination codified in international law. Reflecting the minimalist notion of state responsibilities as propounded by neoliberalism, Jane Hindley argues that 'Any rights which would entail the redistribution of wealth or power and which might interfere with the operation of the market or existing structure of political representation were excluded.'¹² Neil Harvey observed that the state's limited interpretation of Convention 169 'had the effect of not only ignoring the social and economic factors that prevented indigenous peoples from truly exercising their rights, but also reproduced the authority of the state (and specifically the executive branch) over the acceptable practices of indigenous peoples'.¹³

The Chiapas uprising on 1 January 1994, the day NAFTA went into effect, brought many of these tensions to public light, disrupting the myth of progress and exposing the devastating poverty, racism and neglect that Mexico's 62 indigenous *pueblos* continue to experience. In November 1996, the Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación (Commission on Concord and Pacification, COCOPA) proposed its initiative for constitutional reform based on the San Andrés Peace Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture that were signed by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, EZLN) and government representatives in February of that year. Despite being designed by government representatives and receiving mass approval after the widespread deliberation convened by the EZLN and the National Indigenous Congress, then-president Ernesto Zedillo rejected the plan. A stalemate ensued until the next presidential term (*sexenio*), when the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, PAN) candidate, Vicente Fox, promised to introduce the COCOPA initiative to Congress and resolve the problem in Chiapas in 20 minutes. In 2001, the EZLN travelled by

Kevin J. Middlebrook (ed.), *Dilemmas of Political Change in Mexico* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, and San Diego: Centre for US–Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 2003), pp. 440–65.

¹² Jane Hindley, 'Towards a Pluricultural Nation: The Limits of Indigenismo and Article 4', in Rob Aitken, Nikki Craske, Gareth A. Jones and David E. Stansfield (eds.), *Dismantling the Mexican State?* (London: Macmillan, and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) pp. 225–43.

¹³ Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion*, pp. 201–2.

caravan through 12 states to the Mexican capital for a historic appearance on the floor of the lower house of the Mexican Congress. Despite broad support for the COCOPA proposal, both houses of the legislature passed the Law on Indigenous Rights and Culture, a counter-reform that fails to meet the basic agreements of the San Andrés Peace Accords.

Shannon Speed, who has mapped the transition from human rights to neoliberal multiculturalism in Mexico, argues that the state has reversed its course in fully implementing neoliberal multiculturalism because the Zapatistas have taken their demand for autonomy largely outside of the state, 'developing in a unilateral process that does not seek state recognition in order to verify or make real its existence. Because they are outside of the state, these discourses and practices cannot be harnessed by the state to the task of limiting the scope and impact of indigenous rights, or of constituting new neoliberal subjects.'¹⁴ Extending Speed's observations, I explore a particularly gendered strategy of indigenous autonomy that occurs outside of the state. My analysis highlights the ways in which indigenous women activists have challenged the use of gender by the state as a discourse that regulates indigenous subjects and have taken a critical stance toward the increased regulatory role of NGOs in defining indigenous culture, a role that is crucial to neoliberal governance. With the passage of the Law on Indigenous Rights and Culture that undermines the basic guarantee for indigenous self-determination, indigenous women's efforts to put autonomy into practice in every sphere of life experience have become ever more important to implementing and sustaining a long-term movement for self-determination. Their grassroots practice of construction and consultation has sustained the movement beyond the claim for rights in the face of military repression and governmental recalcitrance. These strategies may be instructive to other social movements given the recent neoliberal state strategy of co-opting selected rights discourses without implementing real change.¹⁵

Contesting Gender as a Discourse of Governmentality

When marginalised groups create an alternative sense of belonging in the context of racism and exclusion, they enact what US Latino scholars have theorised as cultural citizenship.¹⁶ In a land that has historically excluded

¹⁴ Shannon Speed, 'Rights at the Intersection: Gender and Ethnicity in Neoliberal Mexico', in Speed, Hernández Castillo and Stephen (eds.), *Dissident Women*, pp. 203–21; see also Shannon Speed and María Teresa Sierra, 'Critical Perspectives on Human Rights and Multiculturalism in Neoliberal Latin America', *PoLAR*, 28: 1 (2005), pp. 1–9.

¹⁵ Schild, "'Gender Equity" without Social Justice', pp. 25–8.

¹⁶ IUP Cultural Studies Working Group, 'The Concept of Cultural Citizenship', Working Paper no. 1 (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, 1987);

them, the indigenous rights movement in Mexico has developed this alternative cultural citizenship and has demanded the right to recognition as indigenous peoples with a distinct and historical relationship to their land and the sacred geographies associated with that relationship. Yet feminist anthropologist Aihwa Ong's conceptualisation of cultural citizenship posits that subject-making is a two-way process. Ong has argued that we must consider not only the elaboration of a collective subjectivity by an aggrieved group but also how the state is involved in subject-making or what she calls 'subject-ification'.¹⁷

This historic project of subject-making by the Mexican state has often made it difficult for indigenous actors to articulate an independent indigenous subjectivity because the official racial state discourse of *mestizaje* – a project of assimilation that fully celebrates the indigenous past while denying an indigenous present – has so fully occupied the meaning of the term 'indigenous'. While indigenous social actors were primarily active in campesino or peasant organising before the 1994 uprising, some scholars have argued that state-generated discourses about indigenous people as the subject of rights (specifically the signing of ILO Convention 169) have, in fact, produced the indigenous identities.¹⁸ In an analysis of how state-produced discourses create race and cultural identity categories, political scientist Courtney Jung claims that in addition to aligning with the international discourse on indigenous rights, 'indigenous identity developed political resonance only to the extent that it is employed by the state itself as a marker of inclusion and

Renato Rosaldo, 'Cultural Citizenship in San Jose, California', *PoLAR*, 17 (1994), pp. 57–63; William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (eds.), *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space and Rights* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Ong sees citizenship as 'a cultural process of "subject-ification," in the Foucauldian sense of self-making and being-made by power relations that produce consent through schemes of surveillance, discipline, control, and administration': see Aihwa Ong, 'Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States', *Current Anthropology*, 37: 5 (1996), p. 737.

¹⁸ It's worth noting that campesino identity, as a form of class-based popular politics, was favoured over supposedly local identities that were often indigenous in nature through the emergent paradigm of land reform in the post-revolutionary state. See Christopher Boyer, 'Naranja Revisited: Agrarian Caciques and the Making of Campesino Identity in Postrevolutionary Michoacán', in Alan Knight and W.G. Pansters (eds.), *Caciquismo in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2005), pp. 71–93. Elsewhere I have argued that the rise of indigenous identity also coincided with the fatigue of a crumbling corporatist regime in which identities such as 'popular', 'peasant' and 'worker' had become meaningless as modes of organising given complete co-option through state clientelism. See Maylei Blackwell, '(Re)Ordenando el discurso de la nación: el Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas en México y la práctica de la autonomía', in Natividad Gutiérrez Chong (ed.), *Mujeres y nacionalismo: de la independencia a la nación del nuevo milenio* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2004), pp. 193–234.

exclusion'.¹⁹ Even as part of campesino movements, early indigenous organising in the 1970s and 1980s began to reclaim the rich social and cultural life worlds that were generated out of indigenous epistemological frameworks and cosmovisions. While state discourses contributed to the groundswell that produced the contemporary indigenous rights movement, earlier collective identities and a cultural sense of being and belonging not only predate this move by the government but also contributed to the mass indigenous mobilisation that emerged nationally after the 1994 Zapatista uprising. Ong's formulation is a much-needed balance to understanding the formulation of dissident subjectivities and projects of belonging. She defines cultural citizenship as 'cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory'.²⁰ Indeed, Nancy Grey Postero's thinking on indigenous subject formation in Bolivia also affirms this approach that 'indigenous people are both the agents and the subjects of this new discourse of citizenship' – that is, they participate in both what she calls the 'push from below' and 'incorporation from above'.²¹

Often the state's opposition to claims for indigenous autonomy ultimately revolves around questions of gender and hegemonic constructions of indigenous culture.²² This response stems out of the dual and contradictory logic that the government has utilised in response to women's mobilised presence within the EZLN and its base communities and autonomous municipalities. The government first claimed that the Zapatista uprising was not truly indigenous (and was led by outside agitators and feminist infiltrators) because, among other reasons (that it was well organised and executed), women comprised some 30 per cent of the armed forces, and the rights of women to equality, a life free of violence, equal pay and the right to choose their partner and when and whether to bear children were codified in the Women's Revolutionary Law. In direct contradiction, when the indigenous movement did make a claim for indigenous people's own autonomy, the government justified its denial of the right of autonomy to indigenous people on the claim that women's rights are not protected within traditional indigenous customs and practices.²³ A gendered logic of racism has often served as the lynchpin to

¹⁹ Courtney Jung, 'The Politics of Indigenous Identity: Neoliberalism, Cultural Rights and the Mexican Zapatistas', *Social Research*, 70 (Summer 2003), p. 4.

²⁰ Ong, 'Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making', p. 738.

²¹ Nancy Grey Postero, *Now We Are Citizens: Indigenous Politics in Post-multicultural Bolivia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

²² Blackwell, '(Re)Ordeando el discurso de la nación'.

²³ See *ibid.*; and Melissa M. Forbis, 'Hacia la Autonomía: Zapatista Women Developing a New World', in Christine Eber and Christine Kovic (eds.), *Women of Chiapas: Making History in Times of Struggle and Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 231–52.

the debate in the sense that much of the government's argument against indigenous self-governance has hinged on the question of gender. In fact, this governmental tactic has been deployed so often that we might consider how gender has become a discourse of governmentality defining what is authentically indigenous in the first count, and a mode through which the government has attempted to regulate indigenous subjects in the second.

Foucault turned toward governmentality as a way of understanding how neoliberal governance acts upon populations through the logic of the market so that subjects become self-regulating individuals in a context where power is de-centred and regulation and control are not limited to state institutions but include a wide range of civil society actors (NGOs, for example).²⁴ This is linked to the political rationality that shifts responsibility for services formally provided by the state in social welfare, education and social services onto the individual. The neoliberal withdrawal of the state is tied to personal responsibility and new technologies of the self whereby subjects must become self-managing.²⁵ A new mode of gendered governmentality has functioned in the discursive struggle around indigenous autonomy in legislative debates, which regulates who and what is indigenous. Along with other scholars of multicultural legal reforms in Latin America, Hale has cautioned that

the concession and prohibitions of neoliberal multiculturalism structure the spaces that cultural rights activists occupy: defining the language of contention; stating which rights are legitimate, and what forms of political action are appropriate for achieving them; and even, weighing in on basic questions of what it means to be indigenous ... Multiculturalism, I contend, is the *mestizaje* discourse for a new millennium, offering a parallel mix of opportunity and peril.²⁶

²⁴ Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', and Colin Gordon, 'Government Rationality: An Introduction', in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 87–104 and 1–52; Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose (eds.), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and Rationalities of Government* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996). See also Jonathan Xavier Inda, *Targeting Immigrants: Government, Technology, and Ethics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); and Aiwā Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

²⁵ Lemke argues that this is a technique of power which harmonises collective and individual bodies, corporations, states and universities in order to be 'lean', 'flexible' and 'autonomous' as well as an 'integral link between micro- and macro-political levels of analysis (e.g. globalization or competition for "attractive" sites for companies and personal imperatives as regards beauty or a regimented diet)': see Thomas Lemke, "'The Birth of Bio-Politics': Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality', *Economy and Society*, 30 (May 2001), p. 203. Critically, what he does not mention is how these processes are gendered and how they are seen in recruitment of transnational capital to *maquiladoras* as well as to the forms of beauty pageants and gendered surveillance and regulation that are widespread in such industries.

²⁶ Hale, 'Does Multiculturalism Menace?', pp. 490–1.

Teresa Sierra asserts that the state has utilised the discourse of multiculturalism as a form of neo-*indigenismo*, just the latest phase in the project of state assimilation.²⁷ While there is increasing concern about the ways in which neoliberal states have begun to use multiculturalism as a new form of governance, Schild cautions us about the ‘confluence [that] seems to be at work between the activities of women’s movements, namely, the struggle to define new political identities and thus to expand citizenship, and the project of constitution and regulation of identities and subjectivities by a neoliberal state form’.²⁸

Both of these warnings are important and, in fact, interrelated. As a new relation of rule between the state and indigenous communities was consolidated through a watered-down multiculturalism, the Mexican state used a gendered logic of racism to define and regulate indigenous subjectivity and rights. While Hale warns against forms of selective governmental cooption that define which activists are appropriate indigenous subjects, I argue that gender has become a discourse of governmentality used to regulate and define ‘good’ and ‘bad’ indigenous subjects: those worthy or unworthy of rights and autonomy as peoples.

Indigenous women activists have played a critical role in contesting the government’s use of gender to deny the collective indigenous rights. In the historic EZLN speech to the Mexican legislature delivered by Comandanta Esther in March 2001, gender continued to be a salient theme in the debate on passing the proposed COCOPA law, which would have recognised indigenous peoples’ right to autonomy and respect of indigenous rights and culture.²⁹ Comandanta Esther and other indigenous rights movement activists addressed legislators who continued to use gender as a red herring, exploiting the view of indigenous communities as being inherently less equitable in gender relationships. She argued:

That is simply the way of life, and death, for us indigenous women. And they tell us that the COCOPA law is going to cause us to be marginalised. It is the law now that permits them to marginalise and humiliate us. For this reason, we have decided to

²⁷ María Teresa Sierra, ‘Derechos humanos, género y etnicidad: reclamos legales y retos antropológicos’, in R. Aída Hernández, Sarela Paz and María Teresa Sierra (eds.), *El estado y los indígenas en los tiempos del PAN* (Mexico City: CIESAS and Miguel Angel Porrúa, 2004).

²⁸ Schild, ‘New Subjects of Rights?’, p. 606. For feminist engagements with notions of gender, biopower and neoliberal governmentality in Mexico, see Rosemary Hennessy, ‘Gender Adjustments in Forgotten Places: The North-South Encuentros in Mexico’, *Work and Days*, 57/58 (2011), pp. 181–201.

²⁹ For other essays that analyse Comandanta Esther’s speech, see Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo, ‘Indigenous Law and Identity Politics in Mexico: Indigenous Men’s and Women’s Struggles for a Multicultural Nation’, *PoLAR*, 24 (2005), pp. 90–109, which includes an important summary of the critiques of indigenous law or *usos y costumbres*; and Sylvia Marcos, ‘The Borders Within: The Indigenous Women’s Movement and Feminism in Mexico’, in Marguerite Waller and Sylvia Marcos (eds.), *Dialogue and Difference: Feminisms Challenge Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

organise for the struggle as Zapatista women, in order to change our situation because we are already tired of so much suffering without having our rights. I am not telling all this to you so you feel sorry for us or come save us from these abuses. We have fought to change that and we will continue on.³⁰

In this way we can see how subject-making is a two-way process. On the one hand, indigenous women activists, who have waged a grassroots challenge to have the full right to participate in the indigenous movements they helped to create, have forged a new political project that upholds the rights of both women and indigenous people. Yet on the other, the state's use of gender as a discourse of governmentality redeploys the historic construct of indigenous people as stubborn roadblocks to modernity and progress. An ideological underpinning of the gendered logic of racism views indigenous communities as somehow more sexist because it posits indigenous people as premodern, uncivilised and perpetually stuck in a temporal frame of 'pastness'. In a circuitous formulation, indigenous peoples are seen as backward, non-modern subjects who are unable to govern themselves precisely because they are situated temporally always in the past.

What is new is how Mexico's advancement as a nation is now measured in part by using gender as a major indicator of modernity and progress through the neoliberal co-option of technocratic gender language by the World Bank and IMF. While constitutional reform represents a historic departure, it has nevertheless re-inscribed the indigenous problem as a cultural problem.³¹ Staged on the terrain of culture, gender has become a signifier in discursive struggles about rights and has been mobilised in the new (resurrected but reconfigured) racism. This gendered logic of racism functions despite the overwhelming evidence that the Mexican government can hardly be called a protector of women's rights. Further, it flies in the face of the broad visibility gained by indigenous women activists who have demanded that gender justice must be included in indigenous law over the past two decades.

While the state has used a culturalist discourse to perpetuate the stereotype that indigenous communities are inherently, indeed culturally, more sexist (another form of backwardness if we measure modernity in terms of gender equity), there is a struggle over meaning that highlights both a new form of governmentality and new forms of indigenous women's empowerment and resistance. Organised indigenous activists, who have insisted on the simultaneity of indigenous and women's rights, have troubled the legitimacy of the state's gendered logic of racism against indigenous autonomy. One of the

³⁰ Central message of the EZLN, delivered by Comandanta Esther at the Legislative Palace of San Lázaro, Mexico City, 28 March 2001. Published in *La Jornada Perfil*, 19 March 2001, pp. 2–4.

³¹ Hindley, 'Towards a Pluricultural Nation', p. 236.

clearest responses to the state's gendered logic of racism came in Comandanta Esther's powerful 2001 speech:

We, in addition to being women, are indigenous and as such, we are not recognised. We know which are good and which are bad traditions and customs. The bad ones include hitting or beating women, the selling and buying [of women], marriage by force against her will, not being allowed to participate in assembly, not being permitted to leave the house. This is why we want the Indigenous Rights and Culture Law to be approved. It is very important to us, indigenous women all over Mexico.

It will mean that we are recognised and respected as the women and the indigenous people we are. This means that we want to have our form of dress, speaking, governance, organization, prayer, healing, our form of working in collectives, of respecting the earth, and understanding life, that is the natural world we are part of. Our rights as women are also included in this law, so that no one will be able to prevent our participation, our dignity or integrity of our work, the same as men. This is why we tell the Deputies and Senators to carry out their duties, to be true representatives of the people.³²

Serving as a delegate of the women's commission of the Congreso Nacional Indígena (National Indigenous Congress, CNI), María de Jesús Patricio, who participated in the formation of the CONAMI, also spoke to the legislature that day, responding to questions posed by deputies about women's rights within indigenous autonomy. She said:

Retaking the issue of whether [indigenous] customs and practices injure indigenous women in the pueblos, in the communities, we feel that it is not only a problem of indigenous people. No, it goes beyond that, it is all of civil society as well. Yet, only the negative is attributed to indigenous peoples. The problem is [the perception] that if the COCOPA initiative is approved, it is going to damage women. We say no.

To the contrary, it will fortify the equitable participation of both men and women. Of course, there are problems that we are eliminating and refining, but it's not only indigenous pueblos, it is everyone. I believe this implies that we need to be united as indigenous pueblos, civil society and all those who want to create an alternative response to this situation we are living in now.³³

While indigenous women leaders have been key in refuting government attempts to deny indigenous autonomy based on a false concern for women's rights, they have only been able to do so through their struggle to interrogate the meaning of women's rights within indigenous law, which has meant challenging the masculine bias of tradition itself. While Comandanta Esther's speech is seen as a watershed moment, we must look beyond it to see the work that indigenous women activists have engaged in to develop and articulate a women's rights agenda within the national indigenous autonomy movement that now spans two decades.

³² Speech published in *La Jornada Perfil*, 29 March 2001.

³³ *Ibid.*

This ongoing debate was very much alive and hotly contested in many of the events that I attended along the final stops of the Zapatista Caravan. For example, in the days just prior to Comandanta Esther's speech, the CONAMI held a forum on indigenous women's rights just down the street from the legislative chambers to advocate for the passage of the COCOPA initiative, as well as to strategise other legislation. With only two specific paragraphs in the proposed COCOPA law addressing gender, some indigenous women's organisations and feminist allies, supported by legislators of the centre-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of Democratic Revolution, PRD), worked on secondary laws to amplify the guarantees of indigenous women's rights that existed in the San Andrés Accords and the Revolutionary Women's Law, and that were present in the results of many grassroots consultations.³⁴ Martha Sánchez, who has a long history in the indigenous rights movement as a member of the Council of 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance of Guerrero, leader of the CONAMI, and former leader of the Asamblea Nacional Indígena Plural por la Autonomía (National Plural Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy, ANIPA, one of the two national indigenous organisations), was at the forum. She stated: 'The COCOPA initiative is not the problem. The Revolutionary Women's Law itself was not a gift from anybody. It was a product of a struggle indigenous women mounted that we have made our own.'

Indeed, even days before that, I heard testimony of this struggle while I stood among the crowd gathered in honour of International Women's Day, which was celebrated by indigenous women community organisers and the Zapatista Caravan in Milpa Alta on the outskirts of Mexico City. During the lively celebration, representatives from the CONAMI read a speech and women delegates of the Zapatista Caravan including Comandanta Esther, Susana and Yolanda shared stories of encouragement and struggle. Comandanta Esther stated:

In the beginning, I had to pay the price for truth. The men didn't like the idea [of women joining the struggle]. According to them, women were only good for having children and they should take care of them. And there are some women who have that idea in their heads. Some men said it wasn't good, that women didn't have the right to participate, that women are stupid ... Little by little the men began to understand and the women also. That's why women are fighting now ... We see women can be strong'.³⁵

³⁴ 'Situation, Rights and Culture of Indigenous Women' was one of the working sessions of the San Andrés Accords, and although government negotiators did not accept many of the women's demands, one of the key outcomes was that women mobilised around a process that gendered the indigenous movement's call for autonomy to include indigenous women's bodily, political and cultural autonomy. The EZLN itself recognised the triple oppression of indigenous women and felt that the San Andrés Accords fell short in protecting indigenous women's rights. ³⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

Indeed, a great debate occurred at the third CNI, a critical space of articulation of the indigenous movement in Mexico, which took place weeks prior in March 2001 in Nurío, Michoacán, one of the last stops on the Zapatista Caravan. There was a proposal to have one of the many working sessions of the meeting dedicated to a discussion about indigenous women's rights. While there was an outpouring of support from many sectors of the indigenous movement, including the EZLN, there was also considerable resistance. The workshop in which the proposal was being considered was overflowing with participants, and as the discussion began, each woman who stood to propose the women's session and defend the important issues proposed for discussion was met by several men who argued that there should not be a separate space for indigenous women's issues. Gathered in a big room holding concentric circles of participants, the delegates of the CNI debated furiously. After about an hour, the opposition receded into the ocean of voices of those activists who had new proposals, debates and ideas about women's rights, indigenous law and women's participation in the indigenous movement and community assemblies. Eventually the tide turned solely to discussing indigenous women's issues. This current was supported both by delegates of the EZLN joining the session who spoke out in favour of supporting women's rights and by Blanca Chancoso, a principal leader of the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, CONAIE), who made a statement of solidarity.

While the mere presence of Comandanta Esther on the congressional floor was symbolic, indigenous women not only advocated for the passage of indigenous rights legislation but also took the opportunity to refute the government's negation of indigenous autonomy based on gendered claims. This was not accidental. It was the result of a decade of political work and organising by indigenous women, in both local and national movements, who have developed a shared critique of women's oppression in *usos y costumbres*, as well as a collective validation and celebration of traditions that affirmed their status as indigenous women. Postcolonial feminist scholars have demonstrated how colonial regimes have often created local patriarchies through customary law, a colonial construct which reifies cultures in ways that often enshrine the rights of men. Lata Mani argues that while debates on so-called traditional practice 'became an alibi for the colonial civilizing mission on the one hand, and on the other hand, a significant occasion for indigenous auto-critique', women were marginalised in all aspects of the debate.³⁶

³⁶ Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 2. For debates about indigenous law and human rights, see Pedro Pitarch, Shannon Speed and Xochitl Leyva Solano (eds.), *Human Rights in the Maya Region: Global Politics, Cultural Contentions, and Moral Engagements* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

Indigenous women activists, who firmly grounded their vision of autonomy within the collective autonomy of indigenous peoples, refuted governmental attempts to dismiss claims to indigenous autonomy through an illusionary concern for women's rights. Their active participation in the struggle for indigenous and gendered rights makes it difficult for the government to monopolise gender discourse as a form of social control, or to define the subjectivity of indigenous peoples using a gendered logic of racism.

*Gendering the 'Right to Have Rights': Multiplying the Spaces of
Autonomy within Daily Life*

Indigenous women began to enunciate themselves as historical and legal subjects on a mass level through their participation in local indigenous rights organising in the 1990s, which became visible and grew into a national movement after the 1994 Zapatista uprising. Through grassroots consultation in numerous workshops, meetings and gatherings over the course of the subsequent decades, they not only formulated their demands as citizen/subjects, but also developed an analysis of indigenous autonomy as a practice that occurs largely at the level of daily life and often outside of the purview of the state.³⁷ In this view, and in the observations I made during my fieldwork with the CONAMI, autonomy is practised in the home, workplace and organisation, in the assembly, through the cargo system and the traditional structures of indigenous governance and jurisprudence, as well as in the municipality and in relation to the state. In this way, indigenous women activists have transformed rights discourse into a practice within the many arenas of their lives, thereby multiplying their zones of autonomy.³⁸ The multifaceted nature of their understanding of indigenous autonomy is captured well in the

³⁷ For further discussion of these early workshops in Chiapas see Nellys Palomo, Yolanda Castro and Cristina Orci, 'Mujeres indígenas de Chiapas: nuestros derechos, costumbres y tradiciones', as well as many of the essays and documents in Nellys Palomo and Sara Lovera (eds.), *Las Alzadas* (2nd edition, Mexico City: CIMAC and Convergencia Socialista, 1999), pp. 65–81; and Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo, 'Between Hope and Adversity: The Struggle of Organized Women in Chiapas since the Zapatista Rebellion', *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 3: 1 (1997), pp. 102–20. For the development of these community-based local workshops into a national indigenous women's movement, see Maylei Blackwell, 'Weaving in the Spaces: Indigenous Women's Organizing and the Politics of Scale in Mexico', in Speed, Castillo Hernández and Stephen (eds.), *Dissident Women*, pp. 115–56.

³⁸ Maylei Blackwell, 'Zones of Autonomy: Gendered Cultural Citizenship and Indigenous Women's Organizing in Mexico', in Kia Lilly Caldwell, Kathleen Coll, Tracy Fisher, Renya K. Ramirez and Lok Siu (eds.), *Gendered Citizenships: Transnational Perspectives on Knowledge Production, Political Activism, and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 39–54.

Declaration of the Second National Gathering of Indigenous Women that took place in 2000 in Chilpancingo, Guerrero:

We believe that autonomy of our peoples includes all areas of our lives – the home, family, community, region – and that it has to do with the respect and recognition of our culture, our territories, our traditional medicine. For us, autonomy means parity, democracy, and equity between men and women, indigenous and non-indigenous, between all human beings, and, above all, that our rights be recognised as the original peoples we are.

Using indigenous autonomy as a shared discursive terrain, indigenous women activists have transformed autonomy into a political tool to democratise and empower indigenous women and their communities. The demand for autonomy is part of a larger framework of basic rights for indigenous people that include the right to be a pueblo, the right to land and protection of territory, the right to self-determination and autonomy, the right to cultural traditions and forms of political representation and jurisprudence, and the right to protect and use the natural resources of the land.³⁹ While the indigenous women's movement has supported the juridical, territorial and cultural claims to autonomy, it has also expanded the meaning of these claims to include women's bodily, political and economic autonomy, creating a daily lived *practice* of autonomy that is situated in the multiple spheres of sociality and politics in their communities. Melissa Forbis' work found a similar pattern in which indigenous women engage in autonomy collectively as part of Zapatista base communities and at the individual level of their daily lives.⁴⁰ These intimate, grounded and practical autonomies are practised by those who have declared themselves autonomous municipalities and those women in the broader national indigenous movement as a way of advancing indigenous autonomy despite the government's failure to implement the San Andrés Accords.⁴¹ Further, the CONAMI, like many indigenous rights organisations, has built upon the process and political methodology of *consulta* that relies on

³⁹ For a history of the way in which autonomy developed as a shared framework of meaning, see Laura Carlsen, 'Autonomía indígena y usos y costumbres: la innovación de la tradición', *Chiapas*, 7 (1999), pp. 45–70; and Lynn M. Stephen, 'Indigenous Autonomy in Mexico', in Bartholomew Dean and Jerome Levi (eds.), *At the Risk of Being Heard: Identity, Indigenous Rights, and Post-Colonial States* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 191–216.

⁴⁰ Forbis, 'Hacia la Autonomía'.

⁴¹ Hernández Navarro and Carlsen, 'Indigenous Rights', p. 457; for more about the San Andrés Accords, see Luis Hernández Navarro and Ramón Vera Herrera (eds.), *Acuerdos de San Andrés* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1998). While many indigenous communities in Chiapas (see Speed, 'Rights at the Intersection'), Oaxaca, Guerrero and Michoacán have declared themselves autonomous, many other communities who are not specifically indigenous have also adopted the Zapatista philosophy of autonomy to protest the lack of social services under neoliberalism. See, for example, Michelle Tellez, 'Globalizing Resistance: Maclovio Rojas, a Mexican Community *en lucha*', unpubl. PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2005.

indigenous notions of deliberation and civic participation in order to further indigenous autonomy, create new democratic forms of grassroots participation and foster linkages between indigenous communities and Mexican civil society at large. Inspired by the Revolutionary Women's Law – also the result of community consultation and deliberation before the uprising in 1994 – new dialogues on indigenous revitalisation and cultural, social, political and juridical practices have blossomed into numerous community-based forums among indigenous women on *usos y costumbres*, or indigenous law.⁴² Women activists, in movement gatherings across Mexico, have added their own innovations to the process of consulta to empower women and to give their own insights (*dar su palabra*) to the conversation about how indigenous rights are practised. These forums have created grassroots pedagogy of autonomy for women in indigenous communities, allowing the most marginalised actors within marginalised communities to make decisions about the parameters and practices of indigenous autonomy, rather than waiting for the state, or even their leaders, to define its limits.⁴³

I had a chance to conduct an oral history with María de Jesús Patricio, the Nahuatl community leader from Jalisco and a member of the leadership of the CNI who spoke on the floor of Congress in 2001. She recounted the

⁴² See Rosa Rojas (ed.), *Chiapas, y las mujeres qué?* (Mexico: Centro de Investigación y Capacitación de la Mujer, 1994); and *Chiapas, y las mujeres qué?*, vol. 2 (Mexico: Ediciones del Taller Editorial La Correa Feminista, 1995); and Guiomar Rovira, *Mujeres de Maíz: la voz de las indígenas de Chiapas y la rebelión Zapatista* (Barcelona: VIRUS Editorial, 1996). See also Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo (ed.), *La otra palabra: mujeres y violencia en Chiapas antes y después de Acteal* (Mexico: CIESAS, Grupo de Mujeres de San Cristóbal, Centro de Investigación y Acción para la Mujer, 1998); and her many critical essays including 'Entre el etnocentrismo feminista y el esencialismo étnico: las mujeres indígenas y sus demandas de género', *Debate Feminista*, 12 (2001), pp. 206–30. See also Lynn M. Stephen, 'Género y democracia: lecciones de Chiapas', in María Luisa Tarrés (ed.), *Género y cultura en América Latina: cultura y participación política*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1998), pp. 311–34; and *¡Zapata Lives! Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Marga Millán, 'Mujeres indígenas y zapatismo: nuevos horizontes de visibilidad', in Palomo, Castro and Orci (eds.), *Las Alzadas*, pp. 92–109; Karen Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Eber and Kovic (eds.), *Women of Chiapas*; Shannon Speed, *Rights in Rebellion: Indigenous Struggle and Human Rights in Chiapas* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); and 'Lucha por la tierra, globalización e identidad: la etnohistoria y etnopresente de Nicolás Ruiz', in Maya Lorena Pérez (ed.), *Tejiendo historias: tierra, género, y poder en Chiapas* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Historia, 2004), pp. 91–118; and Speed, Hernández Castillo and Stephen (eds.), *Dissident Women*.

⁴³ For a history of these developments, see 'Women's Rights in Our Traditions and Customs' (trans. María Vinós), in Speed, Hernández Castillo and Stephen, *Dissident Women*; Margarita Gutiérrez and Nellys Palomo, 'Autonomía con mirada de mujer', in Aracely Burguete Cal y Mayor (ed.), *México: experiencias de autonomía indígena* (Copenhagen: Grupo Internacional de Trabajo Sobre Asuntos Indígenas, 1999), pp. 54–86; Blackwell, '(Re) Ordenando el discurso de la nación'; and Hernández, *Etnografías e historias de resistencia*.

importance of the first state-wide Indigenous Women's Gathering of Jalisco in March 1998, revealing how activists are making strides to link the gains made in the national movement back to local communities through state-wide indigenous women's networks that have emerged in Jalisco, Guerrero and Oaxaca.⁴⁴ Challenging the dominant feminist vision that would exclude men from the meeting, Patricio shared why it was important that men were present at a historic gathering of indigenous women.⁴⁵

The women told the men that it was important to have men there at a gathering of women ... so they can listen to what the women like and what they do not like. Apart from the indigenous women in attendance at the first gathering in Jalisco (about 250 delegates), there was the same number of men present. To me, it was really important, most of all in Jalisco, because women should be stating directly to their husbands, or their brothers, or their fathers, the things that they do not like about the customs. And so they told them. They spoke of quitting negative customs that were affecting the development of the indigenous peoples. I liked it very much because the traditional authorities publicly committed themselves to creating new statutes on the participation of women.⁴⁶

Community meetings deliberating *usos y costumbres* have proliferated throughout Mexico over the past two decades, illustrating how women have, through historic, community-based dialogues, increased their participation in the decision-making processes of indigenous communities and how these vibrant practices have the potential to allow women a greater role in the collective self-determination of indigenous peoples in Mexico. While the tangible results of the pedagogies of autonomy used within these meetings and consultations are hard to measure because shifts in perspective about gender and changes in cultural practice are often slow processes, Patricio reflected on the more concrete results:

In fact the women asked for a few things – for example, the suspension of alcoholic beverages in community events and meetings. In fact, now that they [the authorities]

⁴⁴ Blackwell, 'Weaving in the Spaces'.

⁴⁵ While outside the scope of this paper, this posture challenges the historical development of feminist autonomy in the region. With roots firmly in the Left, Latin American feminism developed the notion of feminist autonomy vis-à-vis political parties and revolutionary movements. With the rise of the neoliberal model, and most notably during the Beijing process, this concept transformed and came to embody a critique made by autonomous feminists (*autónomas*) against the increased institutionalisation of feminists (so-called *institucionalizadas*) due to their relationship to states, NGOs and funders. Nellys Palomo, a long-time socialist feminist activist and adviser to several indigenous women's organisations, has said that from her point of view the indigenous women's movement has succeeded where other feminists failed in integrating social change at the grassroots level by involving rather than excluding men. Nellys Palomo, director of K'inál Antzetik of Mexico City, Mexico City, 4 March 1999. For an overview of the debate on feminist autonomy, see Alvarez, 'Latin American Feminisms "Go Global"'.

⁴⁶ Interview with María de Jesús Patricio, member of the CONAMI and the women's commission of the CNI, Chilpancingo, Guerrero, 1 April 2000.

are valuing women and the women are learning that they can make these types of decisions, the sale of alcoholic beverages has been suspended on days when the community assembly meets.

So these are little, slow steps, but they move us toward something, right? And it is necessary to say this to the men. This is why it is important that they hear that we women want our own space as women or meetings specifically of women. It is not to be exclusive and outside of the men but to talk about how we are feeling as women, how things are affecting us, how we have to continue to work toward equity ... in this shared path [where] women's participation is also respected, and ... women can decide, and be in charge ... together ... This is why we say that we have to have men listen. It is necessary that they respect us women, support that we have the same rights as them, that we can also assume positions in the community and anywhere. That we have the ability if we are given the opportunity.⁴⁷

These kinds of consultations are vital to the process of consensus-building and change that indigenous women activists have engaged in to understand and promote their own rights within indigenous communities, and are indeed, in themselves, a practice of autonomy. Within community-based forms of governance, consultation is a way of consensus-building and meaning-making that indigenous women utilise to understand and promote their own rights within indigenous autonomy. For example, Sofia Robles, founding member of the CONAMI and long-time activist with Servicios del Pueblo Mixe (Services of the Mixe People, SER), not only returned to participate in forming a state-wide network of indigenous women in Oaxaca, but also helped to build the regional Network of Mixe Women and was elected in 2012 to serve as the municipal president of Tlahuitoltepec.⁴⁸

Indigenous women's proposals for autonomy have generated controversy in some arenas because some critics feel they are a destabilising current which can potentially derail what is essentially a legal claim that would allow indigenous pueblos to exercise the power of self-governance. Yet, at the plenary session of the Second National Gathering of Indigenous Women, entitled 'The Participation of Women in the Processes of Autonomy for Indigenous Peoples', Tomasa Sandoval of Michoacán, a member of the Organización Nación P'urhépecha and the P'urhépecha women's group Erandi, argued that the seeming tension between the autonomy of indigenous women and the autonomy of indigenous pueblos is 'dos rostros de un mismo problema' (two faces of the same problem). Sandoval noted that it is important to see autonomy as a faculty that has emerged historically out of relations of domination and inequality. Indigenous pueblos have sought out autonomy based on the historic projects and cultures of their peoples, and many pueblos have practised

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Interview with Sofia Robles, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 16 Oct. 2011.

limited forms of community autonomy for centuries, with traditional structures operating outside of the state.⁴⁹

Sandoval claimed that whereas autonomy is largely thought of as a juridical question, the calls for various levels of autonomy – individual, communal, municipal and regional – are interlinked and vital to one another.⁵⁰ She even suggested that without a consideration of women, the political and cultural project of indigenous autonomy would not be ‘a complete autonomy because women’s right to land and to equality with men is not recognized’. This idea, echoed in many other forums, is a key feature of the political vision emerging from indigenous women’s organising. It builds on the idea that indigenous women’s rights are inalienable and inextricably linked to both indigenous peoples’ rights and women’s rights.⁵¹ This is a much-needed perspective on the debates on multiculturalism and women’s rights that view women purely as individuals who can somehow be isolated from other determining social, cultural and economic factors. Gendering the ‘right to have rights’ has meant that indigenous women active in political and community organisations are speaking out and participating in meetings and community forums. *Dar la palabra*, or the practice of giving one’s opinion or perspective, has transformed how women experience themselves as community members and political actors, how they participate in assemblies and political congresses, and how their ideas are heard.

Speaking on Our Own Terms: The Struggle for Self-Determination in Relation to the Feminist Movement and Increased NGO-isation

In addition to engaging the state and their own communities around the meaning of indigenous law, women’s rights and autonomy, activists have also struggled against racism and discrimination in the NGO sector and across other social movements in Latin America such as the women’s movement. Because much social service provision has recently ceased to be provided by the neoliberal state, NGOs, civil society and the private sector have played a greater role in governance. Schild points to the way in which vast networks of feminist and women’s NGO work are utilised by newly democratised neoliberal regimes to legitimise their own discourses of modernity and development through key terms such as autonomy, accountability and responsibility, or are complicit with such aims. She asserts: ‘The new discourse

⁴⁹ For an extended analysis of this phenomena, see Jeffrey W. Rubin, *Decentering the Regime: Ethnicity, Radicalism, and Democracy in Juchitán, México* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).
⁵⁰ Blackwell, ‘Zones of Autonomy’.

⁵¹ For a discussion of this relationship across Latin America, see Rachel Sieder and María Teresa Sierra, ‘Indigenous Women’s Access to Justice in Latin America’, *Zeitschrift für Menschenrechte*, 2 (2011), pp. 36–51.

of “modernization” championed by governing elites is permeated by an individualised ethos of neoliberal politics whose core elements are the terms and values of market rationality, individual choice, personal responsibility, control over one’s own fate and self-development.⁵² Understanding this shifting terrain and the increased role of NGOs in governmentality, we can understand the stakes involved in the struggle for representation of indigenous cultures at the 10th Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro in São Paulo, Brazil, in 2005. A session on ‘Amazonian Indigenous Women, Organisation, and Resistance’ became an occasion for the unfolding of this debate regarding representation and the question of who controls the way in which indigenous women’s struggle for rights is framed within feminist activist and human rights circles.

The 10th Encuentro was the first to deal with questions of racial, ethnic, sexual and generational difference in a structured and direct manner by including break-out sessions called *Diálogos Complejos* (Complex Dialogues) for all 1,500 participants. These small sessions, facilitated by movement leaders, were designed to foster discussion and debate on questions of diversity in relation to processes of democratisation.⁵³ In addition to the Complex Dialogues, workshops and presentations, led by a wide range of women culled from the wealth of the region’s feminist organisations, created a space to share projects, strategies and histories. In one of the sessions, organised by one of the most prominent feminist NGOs in the region in order to report on its project on indigenous women’s human rights, there was a different kind of ‘complex dialogue’. The debate revolved around power, feminist racism, issues of representation between subjects and objects of research, mestiza and indigenous visions of feminism and human rights, and the place of feminism’s Others. Led by several feminist NGO workers, the workshop seemed to proceed as planned until a lawyer of the group began her portion of the presentation on the indigenous women’s human rights work being carried out in the Peruvian Amazon. Using the logic deployed by mestizo nationalism, she prefaced her talk with comments on the grandeur of ancient indigenous cultures and the former power of their science, arts and architecture.

⁵² Schild, “‘Gender Equity’ without Social Justice”, p. 26.

⁵³ For a history of the Encuentros and questions of diversity, see Sonia E. Alvarez et al., ‘Encountering Latin American and Caribbean Feminisms’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28: 2 (2002), pp. 537–80, a piece that was used by organisers of the 10th Encuentro to think through questions of difference. The theme of the 10th Encuentro engaged questions of feminism and democracy. One central way of dealing with axes of difference was the *Diálogos Complejos*, which included topics such as ‘Feminism and Strategies to Confront Racism in a Democratic Latin America’, ‘Feminism against Ethnocentrism for Latin American Democracy’, ‘Feminism, Youth and Power: Alternatives to Commercialization and Marginalization in Search of Democratic Perspectives’, and ‘Feminism and Lesbianism – Sexualities and Democracy’.

Returning to current times, the NGO lawyer's report couched the human rights violations in the Peruvian Amazon in highly sensationalised terms, portraying indigenous women as passive victims and indigenous men as ignorant savages. While the principal strategy of human rights work is usually based on information politics where truth claims are presented in an 'unbiased' and neutral manner, what transpired raised old debates about a colonial feminist gaze that has viewed gender relations in 'undeveloped' cultures through an essentialist lens.⁵⁴ Further, the human rights abuses were portrayed through a culture of poverty logic that assumes that violence, alcohol and illiteracy are cultural traits and values of marginalised peoples, rather than the result of colonial legacies and radically uneven structures of inequality that produce marginalisation.⁵⁵ This echoes a hegemonic cultural construct that views indigenous peoples through a binary of either supposed utopian gender freedom/matriarchy or extreme local patriarchy and racialised male violence.

Feminists have challenged the liberal underpinnings of human rights discourse as exclusionary, because only men of the dominant culture have historically been counted as fully human in legal terms and entitled to these rights. Many others have noted the seeming tension between indigenous rights, or collective rights, and women's rights, which are posited as individual rights. In many debates, these rights get posed as a dichotomy in which they are exclusive of one another (or at least seen as antagonistic to one other).⁵⁶ While the Mexican government has deployed the same narrative, organised indigenous women are reframing this tension in instructive ways. At the Second National Gathering of Indigenous Women, P'urhépecha activist Tomasa Sandoval noted that autonomy has two dimensions: first, the individual right of each human being to autonomy in which the call for autonomy for indigenous women fits; and second, a corresponding notion of the collective right to autonomy for indigenous peoples. Cutting through the

⁵⁴ For discussion of human rights as information politics, see Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁵⁵ The culture of poverty was originally used by Oscar Lewis in *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (New York: New American Library, 1959) and later taken up in the Moynihan Report in the US to explain how African Americans suffer because of their 'culture'.

⁵⁶ For an important argument documenting this tension in Mexico, see Carman Diana Deere and Magdalena León, 'Individual Versus Collective Land Rights: Tensions Between Women's and Indigenous Rights Under Neoliberalism', in Jacquelyn Chase (ed.), *The Spaces of Neoliberalism: Land, Place, and Family in Latin America* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2002), pp. 53–86; for a thorough overview of individual versus collective rights, see Speed, 'Rights at the Intersection'; Shannon Speed and Jane F. Collier, 'Limiting Indigenous Autonomy in Chiapas, Mexico: The State Government's use of Human Rights', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 22 (2000), pp. 877–905; and Sieder and Sierra, 'Indigenous Women's Access to Justice'.

ways in which these two questions have been called contradictory, Sandoval stated:

An indigenous women's right to autonomy cannot exist without the guarantee of autonomy for indigenous peoples. The individual right and the collective right do not contradict one another; they are complementary. That is why we insist that both individual and collective autonomy be strengthened. This will require creativity and initiative because it is a very difficult and long task.

Organised indigenous women have also insisted on the indivisibility of these two sets of rights, and this insistence is a key element of how their demands for gender justice and indigenous autonomy resist the cultural logic of neoliberalism being deployed by states throughout the region. In fact, it just might be *the* key element.

Perhaps the indigenous Mexican women's movement's focus on the practice of those rights, and its insistence on their interconnection and indivisibility, is a needed corrective to the ways in which women's rights in neoliberal regimes have only tended to focus on political rights, divorced from economic, cultural and social rights. Latin American feminist movement demands also lose their full emancipatory capacity when they become separated from economic and social rights. Indeed, feminist scholars posit women activists in the Zapatista uprising as one model for resisting co-option by the state, because these activists proposed a 'new rights-based women's activism that combines goals of gender justice with those of social and economic equality'.⁵⁷ This is an important precedent in this perilous struggle for rights in a neoliberal era.

While feminism has contributed an important critique of the male bias and androcentrism of the assumed universality of human rights doctrine, Chandra Mohanty and numerous other US third world feminists and activists of the global South have pointed out the ways in which gender and sexual norms are often constructed through a Eurocentric lens that views women of the global South and women of colour through a colonial gaze.⁵⁸ In posing her provocative question, 'Is multiculturalism bad for women?', Susan Moller Okin replicates this assumption of the universality of Western liberal constructions of gender.⁵⁹ Her work is an attempted antidote to the romanticisation of marginalised cultures, as well as a directive to be attentive not only to power between cultures but also to how power is expressed and distributed among a group, especially in gendered terms. While Okin and many feminist human rights advocates rightly point to the kinds of violations that take place

⁵⁷ Schild, "Gender Equity" without Social Justice', p. 28.

⁵⁸ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Boundary*, 2: 12 (1984), pp. 333–58; and "Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles', *Signs*, 28: 2 (2002), pp. 499–535.

⁵⁹ Susan Moller Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

in the private sphere, other women scholars of colour have argued that as racialised women who may have a different role in relation to the state and power, the assumption of 'private' as being outside of public does not exist due to state surveillance and regulation of the intimate lives of many women of colour and poor women.⁶⁰ Many other activists have pointed to the bias based on Western Enlightenment that posits the sovereignty of the individual subject and only conceptualises subjectivity through individualism.

Okin's arguments foreshadowed the way in which the Mexican government would posit women's rights as the measuring stick by which to judge whether or not a group deserves cultural rights. This problematic idea emerges from a conception of gender as a primary oppression – one that can be extracted from the other social forces through which it is embedded – rather than the broader understanding of gender as one component within intersecting forms of discrimination. It divorces or isolates gender oppression as if it can be understood as separate from other forms of racial, sexual, geopolitical, class power. This formulation posits rights in an 'either/or' framework that implies that women can choose their gender over their culture. Okin, in fact, goes so far as to suggest that some women would be better off if their cultures went extinct or died out. In addition to being genocidal in nature, this option of becoming culture-less is an operation of hegemonic power that makes dominant culture invisible (or common sense, according to Gramsci) and is thus only available to women of the hegemonic culture. In this case, even if indigenous women somehow were able to leave their cultures behind, they would still be socially constructed as gendered beings through racialised and classed forms of power. Indigenous women in Mexico are not afforded the privilege of seeing gender, race and class as discrete categories they can simply choose from. Instead these categories form an interwoven set of power relationships that thoroughly interpolate gender with ethnicity, race with class, and sexuality with racial assumptions about indigenous women. A key principle of human rights doctrine is that human rights are indivisible. The lesson we can glean from indigenous women's organising in Mexico is a strategy which bases its claims on a 'both/and' perspective that assumes a whole person who can neither be decontextualised from being indigenous, nor divorced from their gender. Typically this cleavage is usually understood as an issue of collective versus individual rights, but as Sandoval argues, both indigenous and women's

⁶⁰ See, for example, Linda Burnham, 'Race and Gender: The Limits of Analogy', in Ethel Tobach and Betty Rosoff (eds.), *Challenging Racism and Sexism: Alternatives to Genetic Explanations* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1994). While we see this in many health and social welfare policies in the US, it is most strikingly apparent in the Mexican government's anti-poverty programme Oportunidades, which gives cash payouts largely to female heads of households to meet state-defined health, education and child welfare goals.

human rights are interdependent and indivisible for indigenous women. In her words, 'One can not exist without the other.'

The NGO lawyer's portrayal of violence was rooted in the cultural racist assumption that violence is inherent to a culture or that there is some cultural causality. In describing the human rights violations that men perpetrated on women, the lawyer's narrative represented indigenous cultures through the same disgust/fascination effect deployed in horror movies. This mode of narration and colonial representation did not sit well with the numerous indigenous women from throughout the region gathered at the workshop, as it was one of the only sessions dedicated to indigenous women's issues at the 10th Feminist Encuentro. More than a struggle over racism and representation, this was a process of construction of indigenous subjectivity and a mode of contestation on the uneven terrain of power where NGOs and civil society have been given an increased role in neoliberal governance and the regulation of identities that were once only the purview of the state.⁶¹ The struggle over meaning is key to understanding power and resistance under neoliberal governance, where power is no longer only centralised within the state but also runs along ancillary networks.

Without having met each other prior to the workshop, one by one all the indigenous women in the room condemned the human rights violations and applauded the NGO's work but interrogated the way in which the mestiza lawyer chose to represent indigenous peoples and cultures. The interaction demanded critical reflection on the relations of power and the need to conduct human rights work that allows victims to speak, narrate and make meaning for themselves by engaging in a politics of empowerment rather than a missionising saviour narrative. The first to speak was a seasoned Garifuna and international human rights activist who was so indignant that she had tears in her eyes as she asked why this mestiza feminist would portray indigenous communities as savage and uncivilised. Mobilising all the authority of social science objectivity, the feminist NGO lawyer responded by mentioning that she had begun her talk by saying that indigenous people of the Amazon were once part of a great and mighty civilisation. Rejecting this alibi of a romantic past, a native professor from North America asked why the women themselves were not present to share their own participation in the project and devise their own strategies for confronting these human rights violations, if in fact the goal of the project was to build their capacity to document, present and

⁶¹ Increased NGO-isation of Latin American women's movements has been well documented in Sonia E. Alvarez, 'Advocating Feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO Boom', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 1: 2 (1999), pp. 181–209; and 'Beyond NGO-ization? Reflections from Latin America', *Development*, 52 (2009), pp. 175–84.

analyse human rights violations. The NGO worker responded, 'because they are not feminists and this is a feminist gathering'.

Next, a powerful young leader of the regional network of Brazilian Amazonian indigenous women claimed the word 'feminist' as her own and, while congratulating the NGO on the project and the work being done, called into question the kinds of unequal relationships mestiza feminists were building with indigenous women. In a passionate speech, she called for a kind of feminist politics in which indigenous women represented themselves, their stories, their own struggles and their own political interests. As each leader spoke in turn, it became clear that there was a shared agenda and vision of indigenous women's feminism in the making; one that challenged those who would claim to speak for indigenous women. After the workshop the indigenous women in the room decided to form an indigenous caucus within the Feminist Encuentro and they called activists to attend a meeting in which they discussed their own visions, strategised about how to network better, and wrote a declaration which was presented to all attendees at the final session of the Encuentro.

In the matter of who controls the discourse about indigenous women and how they seek and safeguard their own human rights, the stakes went far beyond the immediate debate in that room in São Paulo. As the inverse of the cultural alibi, human rights discourses that utilise the supposed brutality and inherent inequality of indigenous cultures perpetuate a logic whereby states can deny indigenous people their rights because of their purported backwardness, a condition that is now measured through gender. Martha Sánchez, leader of the CONAMI of Mexico, who at the time was ending her term as the general coordinator of the National Indigenous Plural Assembly for Autonomy, argued:

I want to tell you that in Mexico in 2001, in order to enact constitutional reform based on indigenous culture and rights – 'usos and costumbres', or customary law as others call it, or indigenous law as we call it – the issue of the rights of women was a point strongly taken up by the Right. The PAN and PRI deputies and senators took it up as [their own] discourse and used it to aggressively attack us during the congressional debate.⁶² The government broke [with this agreement and] betrayed indigenous pueblos, saying, 'we cannot approve a law that gives [indigenous] pueblos territorial resources and [the right to] free self-determination to autonomy because those pueblos violate the rights of indigenous women ... Because they hit them, sell them, mistreat them [and] because they are not asked for their consent to have children.' It is true that all this happens, but not only in indigenous communities. In the cities, in many non-indigenous communities, mothers are forced without consent, and are raped, or beaten, to this day. With all respect, *compañeras*, I am telling you that

⁶² The PRI was the hegemonic political force in Mexico for over 70 years until the centre-right PAN won the presidency in 2000. It should also be noted that those on the Left also have perspectives that are informed by deeply embedded forms of cultural racism and coloniality.

many of us here have been harassed by men ... this means we cannot say, it's 'only them' [indigenous people].

Sánchez spoke powerfully about how cultural racism within feminist discourse in the NGO sector colludes with state power that has attempted to define indigenous cultures. Yet, as the comments and the opposition that grew within the NGO workshop illustrate, organised indigenous women have contested the power of other civil society actors, namely NGOs, to define, represent and regulate their identities and cultures. Not just a mere incident of 'speaking back', this episode led to the formation of a regional indigenous women's network and an organised presence within the Latin American Feminist Encuentros which continued into the next Encuentro in Mexico City, where indigenous women attended in the greatest numbers since the regional gatherings began over 30 years ago.⁶³

Conclusion

Whereas the past policy of indigenismo was an assimilationist project articulated through Mexican nationalism and a racial ideology of mestizaje, recent strategies that have included selective co-option of indigenous movement discourses have served to give the appearance of 'rights' without the actual redistribution of power. As neoliberal governance selectively co-opts gender and cultural rights throughout Latin America, the case of the CONAMI signals the strategies used by women and indigenous social movements to articulate their demands in contexts where there is a limited politics of recognition and a depoliticised use of gender as a technocratic language of modernity meant to limit rather than extend women's ability to seek justice. Indigenous women activists in Mexico are refusing the co-option of gender as a way to govern cultural difference, regulate indigenous subjectivity and refuse indigenous autonomy. Further, indigenous women organisers have multiplied the zones of autonomy in their daily life as well as the terrains of struggle over which the meaning of autonomy is waged. Like many Latin American women activists before them, who engaged in a *doble militancia* or double activism, they have engaged with debates about indigenous autonomy and women's rights internally, within their own communities, as well as externally, in the national discourse. More than advancing the debate on autonomy or contesting the government's discourse, they have been effective at linking political rights to cultural, social and economic rights and making sure gender rights do not become divorced from indigenous rights and vice versa.

⁶³ For continued discussion of indigenous feminism, see Martha Sánchez, *La doble mirada: luchas y experiencias de las mujeres indígenas de América Latina* (Mexico City: UNIFEM/ILSB, 2005); and Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo, 'The Emergence of Indigenous Feminism in Latin America', *Signs: Journal of Culture and Society*, 35 (2010), pp. 539–45.

In this essay I have delineated three ways in which indigenous autonomy is being deployed and have illustrated how these strategies add to the social movement repertoire and allow actors to move beyond a rights discourse, especially in a context where the government has backtracked on its commitment to indigenous rights. First, indigenous autonomy is being used as the language of contention with the state to gain collective rights to self-determination. Second, autonomy has been used as a pedagogy of empowerment that interrogates 'tradition' and the cultural basis of indigenous law, thereby democratising the meaning-making practice of autonomy as well as creating a participatory process of deliberation. Indigenous women activists have been pivotal in showing that it is not enough to call for forms of self-governance. How those forms of governance are practised must also be deliberated and debated. Women's participation in community deliberations will help shape the meaning of indigenous autonomy and how it is practised in the multiple spaces of indigenous women's lives. While many indigenous social movement actors throughout Mexico share this strategy, it is also a particularly gendered strategy because of the historical exclusion that has existed within the structures of governance and decision-making of the Mexican government and some indigenous communities and the emphasis on daily lived realities and a gendered analysis of power. Finally, autonomy has become not only a right but a practice of decolonisation that continues the goals of the indigenous movement without state approval, and which does not supplant or substitute for state engagement but multiplies the spheres in which autonomy can be practised. These three examples suggest alternative strategies elaborated by social movement actors that have broad implications for rights discourse and indigenous autonomy in the era of neoliberalism. The practice of indigenous autonomy that women activists have elaborated is a contestation of the gendered terrain on which the struggle against racism is waged. It expands purely legal understandings of autonomy by creating a lived practice of autonomy which forms new relations of sociality, politicality and historicity. While these new practices of autonomy are constructed from older traditions, they have led to transformations in indigenous governance structures and ways of belonging and have the potential to shift the relations of rule in Mexico.⁶⁴

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Vinculando las formas en que los académicos han visto la cooptación de género y los derechos culturales a través de la gobernanza neoliberal en Latinoamérica, examino cómo el género ha sido utilizado por el Estado como un discurso de gubernamentalidad para regular a los sujetos indígenas. Además, exploro

⁶⁴ Carlsen, 'Autonomía indígena y usos y costumbres'.

cómo las mujeres indígenas activistas en México están creando una *práctica* de autonomía como una estrategia vital para ir más allá del discurso de derechos y desafiar las formas en las que los estados neoliberales han cooptado selectivamente las demandas de los movimientos sociales. A través de sus formas de consulta de base, las activistas indígenas trasladan el concepto de autonomía como un derecho garantizado por el Estado hacia una práctica de descolonización que forma parte de la vida cotidiana y de la sociabilidad comunal.

Spanish keywords: mujeres indígenas, autonomía, derechos indígenas, México, gubernamentalidad

Portuguese abstract. Interligando as maneiras de estudiosos analisarem a cooptação de direitos culturais e de gênero na América Latina pela governança neoliberal, examino como o gênero tem sido utilizado pelo estado como discurso de governabilidade para regulamentar assuntos indígenas. Também exploro como mulheres indígenas ativistas no México vêm criando uma *prática* de autonomia como estratégia vital para irem além do discurso sobre direitos e desafiarem as maneiras pelas quais os estados neoliberais seletivamente cooptaram as exigências de movimentos sociais. Através de suas consultas de base (*grassroots*), mulheres indígenas ativistas deslocam o conceito de autonomia como direito atribuído pelo estado à prática de descolonização que integra a vida diária e da sociabilidade da comunidade.

Portuguese keywords: mulheres indígenas, autonomia, direitos indígenas, México, governabilidade