



UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

## *Resistencia*

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Influence of Mexican indigenous women in the fight against structural and symbolic violence



Master's Thesis

Department of Sociology: Gender, Sexuality and Society track

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## **Abstract**

The present thesis investigates how the resistances, activisms, and insights of Mexican indigenous women influence the fight against structural and symbolic violence. Mexico has an incidence of racist, sexist, and classist violence against indigenous women that has been manifested and perpetrated since colonial times. This has resulted in the silencing of the experiences, perspectives, and resistances of indigenous women. For this reason, this research was conducted with the aim to contribute to the creation of a historical memory of the insights and resistance movements of indigenous women and show that indigenous women are active subjects of social and political change. Through background research and eight semi-structured interviews, I showed that resistance is an active process that manifests through the reappropriation of identity, defense of rights, transformation of mentalities, collective and internal resistance, and sisterhood, companionship, and empathy. I conclude that the resistance movements of indigenous women are multifaceted and ever-present. Indigenous women in Mexico have been main agents in revealing the forms of violence in the country and in inciting change.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

The 1<sup>st</sup> of January of 1994, the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation; EZLN)—an indigenous political and militant group in Chiapas, Mexico—rose to demand justice and democracy (Klein, 2015). Their uprising stood against the Mexican government and the recurring effects of colonialism and capitalism, claiming their rights for land ownership and political decision-making. The EZLN is recognized for its “peaceful mobilizations, dialogue with civil society, and structures of political, economic, and cultural autonomy” (Klein, 2015, p. xvi). In this way, the EZLN is an anti-neoliberal movement that seeks to re-gain control of their territory, as well as the fight for indigenous rights including work, education, access to healthcare, proper housing and nutrition, independence from the state, freedom, justice, and peace (Smeke de Zonana, 2000).

The movement of the EZLN is characterized for the high participation of indigenous women. Since the emergence of the EZLN in 1983, women have been active agents in reducing violence and be part of the revolution, both through social movements and organizations, as well as through discursive spaces between the women themselves (Millán, 1996; Klein, 2015). Even though it was not recognized by the media, Zapatista women proclaimed, during the 1994 revolution, the *Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres*: a law with a list of demands that raises the need to modify the system of violence against indigenous women and improve the conditions for their economic, political, and cultural development. The demands include: the right to participation and political decision-making, the right for work, education, and health, the right for physical integrity, the right to decide over their own bodies, and the State’s responsibility to comply with such rights (Enlace Zapatista, 1993; Millán, 1996).

The rising of the EZLN has received support and solidarity from other indigenous groups across the country. For instance, the Tzotzil Maya group *Las Abejas* formed in the community of Acteal, Chiapas, has stood in solidarity with the Zapatistas (Martínez, 2013). Similar to the EZLN, the women of the community have a protagonist role, as they organize, dialogue, and fight for their rights and autonomy. Nevertheless, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December of 1997, 45 members—mainly women and children—from this community were brutally assassinated by a right-wing paramilitary group (Martínez, 2013; Gutiérrez, 2004). The State was behind this massacre and the president at that time, Ernesto Zedillo, had been meticulously preparing the conditions of this crime to take place. Yet, the government attempted to mask the facts and

claim that the massacre was the result of a “conflict within the members of the community” (Martínez, 2013, p. 2). After more than 20 years, this case remained unpunished.

The massacre in Acteal was executed by the Mexican State to intimidate indigenous communities through the use of terror (Martínez, 2013). Imprisonments, kidnapping, torture, dispossession, and murder have been common actions taken place against indigenous communities who defend their rights (Smeke de Zonana, 2000). This case shows one of the main ways violence against indigenous communities is perpetrated: by silencing and making them invisible. Particularly, indigenous women have been targets of this silencing and invisibility and are often attacked or raped during social mobilizations (Ruiz, 2002). Similarly, the fights and struggles of indigenous women fail to reach the media or are treated with indifference. For instance, femicides—the intentional killing of women by men because of their gender—is a worrying problem in the country (Misra, 2015). During the year of 2019, on average 10 to 11 women were killed a day on account of femicide, and the numbers have continued to increase (Olvera Lezama, 2020). This has caused rage and despair among feminist movements. Nonetheless, the femicides of indigenous women are not acknowledged enough by the media nor by the neoliberal feminists (Lugo, 2020).

Unfortunately, cases of silencing and invisibility of indigenous women are not exceptional. This makes me wonder: what leads to such ways of repression? Why do indigenous women remain in this position up until this day? Indian scholar, Gayatri Spivak (1988) has suggested the concept of the ‘subaltern’. This idea represents those populations—in this case, indigenous women—who are excluded socially, politically, economically, and culturally from hierarchical organizations in society. In other words, the subaltern does not get listened to and results in a more severe form of oppression. Their voices are intentionally excluded from social discourses (Spivak, 1988; Belausteguigoitia, 2001). For indigenous women, this lack of recognition has taken away their identity, their subjectivity, and in some cases, even their life.

The silencing and invisibility of indigenous women can be further explained by looking at the different layers that constitute the manifestation of violence in the Mexican society, namely racism, sexism, and classism (Gall, 2004; Duyos, 2019). Violence against indigenous communities in Mexico has a long and complex history and has been systematically perpetrated up until this day (Gutiérrez, 2004). According to the *Grupo Internacional de Trabajo sobre Asuntos Indígenas* (IWGIA, 2019), 15.1% constitutes the indigenous population in Mexico,



within which 93.3% of the indigenous population lacks access to at least one of the six basic social rights, such as education, health, social security, and housing (Martínez Espinoza, 2012). Indigenous populations are less likely to have access to clean water, have significantly lower incomes, and limited access to high-status jobs (Trejo & Altamirano, 2016). Moreover, indigenous people or dark-brown skinned individuals are often stigmatized and referred with racial slurs, including *naco* or *nahual* (Trejo & Altamirano, 2016). Last but definitely not least, indigenous women have significantly less access to education and are more vulnerable to sexual and domestic violence (Martínez Espinoza, 2012). This shows how indigenous women in Mexico are simultaneously oppressed by their ethnic identity, socioeconomic status, and gender identity, making them a highly marginalized group within Mexican society (Gall, 2004; Gutiérrez, 2004).

Such forms of violence may be referred as structural and symbolic violence. The former referring to a structure, or a system, that denies a particular group of people access to their basic human needs and rights (Ho, 2007). The latter goes hand in hand with structural violence and refers to, as French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1977) suggests, the embodiment of structural inequalities that lead to symbolic violence. This type of violence is manifested through the differences in power between social groups, such as gender relations, in which a powerful group imposes norms and a social order into another group (Lawler, 2011; Bardall, 2019).

Despite these levels of violence, indigenous communities have resisted to the colonial, capitalist, and neoliberal practices that dominate in Mexico. Firstly, it is through the insights and mobilizations of indigenous communities that allow for the understanding of the manifestations of violence in the country. It is precisely the indigenous communities that have uncovered the intrinsically rooted forms of violence perpetrated against them (Ibarra Eliessetch & Sore Galleguillos, 2021). In parallel, the insights and resistances of indigenous women question and challenge the hegemonic discourses in society. An influential example is the speech of the *Comandanta* Esther in 2001 at the Congress of the Union, in the historical center of Mexico City (Enlace Zapatista, 2001).<sup>1</sup> There, the *Comandanta* Esther demanded to be heard and create a dialogue with society about the legal recognition of indigenous peoples (Klein, 2015). During her speech, Esther voiced the constant forms of structural and symbolic violence

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<sup>1</sup> To read the complete speech see: <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2001/03/28/discurso-de-la-comandanta-esther-en-la-tribuna-del-congreso-de-la-union/>

that dominate in the country and reclaimed the need for the recognition of indigenous women's rights.

The speech of the *Comandanta* Esther contains a symbolic value: as an indigenous woman, masked, and rebellious, speaks at a place in which indigenous women have historically been excluded. Esther breaks the traditional logic of parliament, where indigenous voices had no place. This time, Esther, as representative of the voices of indigenous women, resists and challenges the asymmetric power structures in society. She constitutes as an active subject of political change, thus breaking invisibility and achieving recognition (Ibarra Eliessetch & Sore Galleguillos, 2021; Rovira Sancho, 2001).

### **1.1 Fascination for research topic**

What angers me about this topic is how the manifestations of violence against indigenous women (i.e. racism, sexism, and classism) are filled with paradoxes, contradictions, and ambiguities. Mexico is a country with a national narrative constructed around feelings of pride and delight for its rich cultural heritage and history. Political and social discourse takes pride in talking about indigenous cultures, yet, these groups remain to be within the most marginalized and oppressed groups in the country. And rather than acknowledging the problem, it has often been ignored and put under the carpet by social and national narratives. For example, by the State claiming to be anti-racist or "color-blind", or by false promises from political parties to implement policies that assure indigenous women rights (Gall, 2004; Trejo & Altamirano, 2016). In this sense, indigenous groups, particularly indigenous women, remain marginalized. They are the subaltern, the one excluded and *chosen* to be silenced.

On the other hand, I find inspiring how indigenous women have resisted these forms of oppression. Indigenous women have made their voices heard. Cases such as the EZLN show how the participation of indigenous women in resistance movements is extremely important. Without their participation, change to the status quo would not be possible. With their actions, indigenous women do not only create awareness of violence, but also make their voices heard. For this reason, it is from the resistance movements of the Zapatista women that inspired me to develop this thesis.

## 1.2 Research question and sub-questions

The example of the EZLN shows the resistances of Zapatista indigenous women, that is, their organizational processes, their contributions, their insights, their social movements, and the development of self-determination and autonomy. This led me to the desire to explore such resistance movements of other indigenous women in Mexico. My goal is to show how indigenous women resist, challenge, and question violent structures in society, and how they voice their activism. Hence, I aim to demonstrate that indigenous women are subjective agents of political and social change. The main question that I will explore throughout this thesis is: How can the resistances, activisms, and insights of Mexican indigenous women influence the fight against structural and symbolic violence?

It is interesting to analyze the resistance processes of indigenous women that seek to break with the structural violence that exists in Mexico, demanding the fulfillment of their rights and the deconstruction of the power relations between indigenous women, men, and the State. Therefore, this question seeks to explore and analyze the ways in which indigenous women denature violence to place themselves in a position of action as main drivers of change.

In order to be able to answer the main research question for this thesis, it is important to understand how, why, and against what the resistance movements arise. Therefore, in addition to focusing on resistance, I would like to explore, through the consideration of History and indigenous women's stories and subjectivities, how racist, sexist, and classist violence is maintained and perpetrated in Mexico. Thus, sub-questions include:

- How is violence against indigenous women maintained and perpetrated?
- How do Mexican indigenous women experience the construction of femininity (i.e. love relations, labor, family, violence, etc.)?
- How do indigenous women organize against symbolic violence?
- How do Mexican indigenous women identify structural racism, sexism, and classism?
- How do Mexican indigenous women construct new narratives, agencies, and subjectivities?
- How do Mexican indigenous women resist the status quo?
- How do indigenous women imagine a better world?
- How do indigenous women perceive and define the concept of resistance? And why do they think this is important?

### **1.3 Relevance and research objective**

Answering the former questions is important to me and to others because of how rooted and intrinsically embedded these problems are within the Mexican society. It is important that the history of oppression of indigenous women is understood and not being forgotten. It is necessary to understand the ways in which powerful regimes such as colonialism and capitalism interact in complex ways that give rise to problems related to racism, sexism, and classism. As a woman myself, I have lived part of the gender oppression in Mexico. I grew up learning how to take care of myself and fearful of what could happen to me if I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. And now that women are fighting and creating awareness, it breaks my heart to see that feminist movements are constantly criticized and delegitimized. For this reason, it is within my duty and interest to learn about different forms of oppression and resistance.

The fights, insights, and contributions of indigenous women do not have the recognition or attention they deserve, as they are constantly being repressed, ignored, or silenced, often through the use of violence (Duyos, 2019). This has been a continuous situation since colonial times. For this reason, as Argentinian anthropologists Rita Laura Segato (2016) proposes, it is necessary to engage in a process of restoration of memory, that is, rescue the value and appreciation of the forms of social and political organization of indigenous women who have been repressed in the past. In the same way, it is necessary to break with colonial notions of the indigenous, which has been objectified and imposed to political manipulation (Osorio González, Hernández Lara, & Zizumbo Villarreal, 2020). Instead, it is necessary to reiterate that the notion of indigenous is related to being autonomous and being agents of social and political change. Said this, I aim to contribute to the breaking of the silence barrier that has lasted throughout history, and thus, create a historical memory of their participation in the fight against structural and symbolic violence.

Despite these levels of oppression and marginalization that indigenous women experience, it is important to acknowledge their activism and resistance. As American professor Alexander G. Weheliye (2014) suggests, even in places of oppression, there are moments of liberation. In this way, suffering should not be the defining feature for this analysis. Indigenous women are often regarded as being passive victims of their oppression (Ruiz, 2002). Rather, focus should be directed to the power those moments of liberation can convey in the

subject, thus enhancing notions of agency and subjectivity. For this reason, I want to focus on the concept of *resistencia*: opposition to the status quo. The *resistencia* represents the fight for rights, freedom, and agency. It calls for political and cultural recognition, and it is conceived as action, turning indigenous women into subjective agents in the fight (Millán, 1996; Foucault, 1978). Therefore, in this thesis I aim to acknowledge the struggles that indigenous women face by looking into its history, and at the same time, enhance their activism and resistance. Gaining insight of the activism of indigenous women can contribute in the decolonization of embedded racism and sexism in society, as well as in amplifying their voices and stop their invisibility. In this thesis, my aim is to add knowledge and contribute in showing the activism, strength, and resilience of indigenous women that challenge hegemonic and powerful structures in society.

#### **1.4 Thesis outline**

The structure of this thesis is presented as follows. First, in chapter 2, I will describe the methodology that I used to approach the research question. I explain the process of data gathering, sampling method, and data analysis. I further delve into the topics of positionality, situated knowledge, and horizontal production of knowledge as it is important to consider my position as a researcher, as well as my relationship with and usage of the data. Lastly, in chapter 2, I contemplate some practical challenges faced during the thesis process and the ethical considerations.

Chapter 3 consists of the theoretical framework, which in this case is decolonial feminism. The insights and theories of decolonial feminists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), Angela Davis (1981), and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989), are helpful in approaching the way in which violence against indigenous women is manifested and understanding the complex ways that violence can be experienced. This decolonial view will be important to understand how factors such as gender, race, and class, intersect in the experiences of violence. By considering this, it is possible to move away from dominant Western epistemologies that excludes any type of perspectives. In this way, decolonial feminism seeks to challenge and question the dominant forms of doing feminism.

Subsequently, in chapter 4, I seek to explain how the silencing and invisibility of indigenous women originated by analyzing the history of colonialism in Mexico and explore how this historical event positioned indigenous women in a place of subordination and

oppression. Similarly, in chapter 5, I will show how the effects of colonialism and capitalism have endured until this day, and are expressed through gendered and sexist violence, racism, political violence, megaprojects, and repression. Considering how violence is manifested against indigenous women will be useful to understand their resistance.

Throughout chapter 6, I will provide an answer to my research question. In this chapter I delve into the main results obtained from the data analysis. The way I answer the research question is by emphasizing the active and multifaceted aspect of resistance, that is, it manifests in different forms through time and space. First, I provide a definition of the concept of resistance based on my data analysis. This is then followed by answering the research question with these overarching topics: the reappropriation of identity, defense of indigenous rights, collective and internal movements, and sisterhood, companionship, and empathy. Lastly, throughout chapter 7, I describe the main conclusions and discussions.

## **Chapter 2. Methodology**

In this chapter, I will discuss the process and methodology used to construct the thesis. This includes context, data gathering, sampling method, data analysis, positionality, horizontal production of knowledge, practical challenges, and ethical considerations.

### **2.1 Context**

The context in which I will unfold my thesis is in Mexico, and more specifically, in the areas of Oaxaca, Veracruz, and the State of Mexico. Violence against indigenous women in Mexico is a complex, but recurrent phenomenon that manifests at the micro, meso, and macro levels. Mexico has had an intense and harsh influence of powerful structures, such as colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, and patriarchy, that have shaped how racist, sexist, and classist violence is legitimized and maintained (Gutiérrez, 2004; Gall, 2004; Anzaldúa, 1987; Federici, 2004; Trejo & Altamirano, 2016). For indigenous women the effects of such violence often multiply. Hence, the Mexican context provides an opportunity to understand how different forms of resistance against hegemonic powerful structures take place.

### **2.2 Data gathering**

Throughout this thesis, I aim to acknowledge the different ways in which violence against indigenous women in Mexico is maintained and perpetrated, while at the same time emphasizing how their insights and resistances are challenging such manifestations of violence. The first part of the data gathering consisted in researching background information about the topics in hand, namely racist, sexist, and structural violence. For this, the internet and online data bases (e.g. Google, Google Scholar, and Amsterdam University's catalogue) were used to locate relevant articles, books, and websites. Most of the articles and books had a sociological base. Words such as 'racism', 'sexism', 'violence', 'colonialism', 'patriarchy', 'indigenous', and 'resistance' were used for the search. The literature used in this thesis is a mix of English and Spanish. Given that I am Mexican and have bilingual proficiency in English, there were no language barriers for understanding and interpreting this data.

Considering that in this thesis, one of my aims is to emphasize the voices of indigenous women and focus on their subjectivity, knowledge, and experiences, the second part of the data gathering consisted in semi-structured interviews. Interviewing allowed me to have a closer approach to the perspectives and experiences of indigenous women. Similarly, I decided to gather my data in the form of interviews because, as Talpade Mohanty (2003), suggests, “[...] life stories, and oral histories are a significant mode of remembering and recording experience and struggles” (p. 77). The profile of the interviewees were 18 years or older, (cis)woman, has an identification with an indigenous group or community, and has been involved in social movements such as feminism, activism, and/or defense of human rights. Demographics such as educational level, sexual orientation, or employment were not relevant criteria as I did not aim to be exclusionary in these terms. A table with the full names of the interviewees and their corresponding demographic information can be found in Appendix 1.

Given the diversity of indigenous groups within Mexico, my aim is to interview women from different indigenous communities in order to get a broader and varied overview of subjectivities. The interviewees were recruited through friends and family that have or are working with indigenous communities. Subsequently, after each interview, I asked the interviewee if she had a friend or comrade that would be interested in participating in the interview. This method is known as snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961). I contacted all interviewees via WhatsApp through which I provided them with a brief overview of my research goals and scheduled the date and time of the interview. Some interviewees asked for a more detailed summary or asked for the interview questions beforehand. Of course, this information was provided to the interviewees.

### **2.3 Sampling method: semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are a common methodology for gathering sociological knowledge. The purpose of this type of interviews is to determine the interviewees’ perspectives and experiences (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). In this type of interview, the interviewer employs a relatively detailed interview guide that includes a set of open questions and topics to explore during the interview, but the interviewer may allow flexibility according to the subjects’ needs (Blee & Taylor, 2002; McIntosh & Morse, 2015). This would allow me to have a direction of topics to be discussed, while at the same time, allowing the women to tell me their stories without much of my interference. According to McIntosh and Morse (2015), semi-structured



interviews epistemologically privileges the knower and intends to correct assumptions from dominant discourses. Moreover, Blee & Taylor (2002) claim that semi-structured interviews are particularly useful for analyzing and understanding social movement and activism. In this sense, semi-structured interviews went in line with my research interests and approach for this thesis.

Another characteristic of semi-structured interviews is that the interviewer does not strictly follow a formalized strict of questions, but rather ask mainly open-ended questions (Doyle, 2020). This allows for a discussion and dialogue with the interviewees, thus helpful to gain more insight into their perspectives and opinions. Therefore, before conducting the interviews I prepared a list of questions (see Appendix 2). Although these questions remained relatively the same throughout all the interviews, they were often adapted to the particular situation of the interviewee or the development of the interviewee's answers. The questions formulated for the interviews were created with the aim to gain insight into how the interviewees talked about violence, how they perceived violence, how they become active and organize against this violence, and how do they resist it.

Eight semi-structured interviews were performed and recorded (audio only). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to fly to Mexico to perform the interviews face-to-face, thus, I conducted the interviews via telephone or videocall, depending on the interviewee's preference. Six interviews were conducted via videocall, 1 via telephone, and 1 started as videocall but had to be switched to telephone due to internet difficulties. The advantages of online methods are that it may facilitate hard to reach populations, participants may feel more comfortable in sharing personal information, and it is less costly (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). In this case, online interviewing methods allowed for flexibility and quick organization.

The interviews were performed in Spanish and lasted approximately 1 hour each. Before each interview, I had a small chat with each woman in order to make the interview process less formal and build rapport between the interviewer and the interviewees. Then, I would tell the interviewees the goal of my research, the topics I would approach throughout the thesis, and thank them for their participation. Subsequently, I asked the interviewees whether they had any questions before starting. After this I asked for consent to record the audio of the interview and asked whether the interviewees would be comfortable in having their full name presented in the thesis.

## **2.4 Data analysis**

After the interviews were recorded, I transcribed them, which was done manually. All parts of the transcripts represented in this thesis were translated by the author. Subsequently, I printed the transcripts and used American's scholar Kathy Charmaz (2014) "Grounded Theory Coding". This is an analysis method for qualitative data that allows to make analytic sense of stories, statements, and observations. It is particularly useful for the analysis of interview transcripts as it allows "for close examination and analysis of the data by breaking them into their components" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). In other words, the transcribed data will go through a process of coding, which means "naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each of data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 111). Hence, to be able to answer my research question, I divided the transcripts into different codes by using different color highlighters. Doing this manually was a conscious choice as I am not familiar with a coding software, and due to time constraints, I was unable to learn one. Eventually, I identified 7 overarching themes for answering my research questions, each with sub-themes. The results of this analysis are presented in Chapter 6.

## **2.5 Positionality and situated knowledge**

During this thesis, I attempted to be mindful into how my identity can influence, and potentially bias, my understandings of the world. Knowledge is always situated in a particular context, and it is crucial to acknowledge it as it influences the development of one's research. American professor, Donna Haraway (1988) referred to this process as "positionality", referring to the idea that by acknowledging and understanding one's own position in the world and claims of knowledge, one can produce knowledge with greater objectivity. In other words, my previous knowledge, values, beliefs, and privileges influence how I understand the world, and in effect, my research in this thesis. As Haraway (1988) suggests, positionality generates processes that facilitate the encounter of experiences, dialogue, and reflections in creative and emotive ways. This allows not only to understand and interpret knowledge, but also to sensitize ourselves to change and consider, as researchers, our positions, procedures, and approaches.

I was born and raised in Mexico City and I have studied higher education in Western countries (i.e. The Netherlands and Australia). I am aware that I have had access to a number of privileges that have facilitated my position as to where I am today, such as wealth, upper-middle class, white skin, and being a cis-woman. I acknowledge that my cultural and

educational upbringing, as well as my experiences of violence, have been different than those of the interviewee's upbringing and experiences. Also, the fact that I identify as a feminist could be problematic in this occasion, since the struggles and goals that have molded me to identify as a feminist differ from those of groups or individuals in different contexts. Therefore, situating myself in this research project entails not only reflexing upon my position, but also challenging it. As Walter Mignolo (as cited in Guiliano & Berisso, 2014) proposes, it involves a process of "learning to unlearn to be able to re-learn" (p. 62). Even while writing this thesis I am learning and improving, but also realizing that I still have a long way to go. It goes without saying that this research will still have ambiguities, faults, and gaps. But as Mexican anthropologist Yerid López Barrera (2020) suggests, as a researcher, I have asked myself the following questions when gathering and interpreting data: how do I achieve my responsibility as a sociologist? How can one resolve exhibiting, transgressing, or imposing ideas or categories into other subjects? (p. 1194). Asking such questions throughout a research procedure may prevent knowledge production to fall into generalizations and relativisms (López Barrera, 2020; Corona Berkin, 2020).

## **2.6 Horizontal production of knowledge**

This research will focus on presenting indigenous women as active agents of change and explore, through their subjectivity, knowledge, and experiences, the way in which women intervene with their narratives and actions. To achieve this, I have used Mexican professor Sarah Corona Berkin's (2020) theory of *Producción Horizontal del Conocimiento* (Horizontal Production of Knowledge). This is an investigative approach that allows dialogue and discursive equality. It is 'horizontal' in the sense that the researcher and who that was previously referred to as "object of study", "subject", or "the other", will now be referred to as "peer researchers" (Corona Berkin, 2020, p. 37). In other words, it is through the insights, perspectives, and experiences of indigenous women, together with my own research, that the thesis will be constructed. Thus, a *co*-construction of knowledge by *re*-presenting the women's voices in written form. As Talpade Mohanty (2003) says, "ideas are always communally wrought, not privately owned" (p. 1). For this reason, I have decided to re-present the interviewees insights and voices throughout the whole thesis. In this way, I intend not to create knowledge *about* indigenous women, but instead, *with* them (Castañeda, 2008, as cited in López Barrera, 2020; Corona Berkin, 2020; Talpade Mohanty, 2003).

## **2.7 Practical challenges**

In the process of writing this thesis, I faced a few challenges, which are mostly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned previously, I was unable to fly to Mexico to meet the interviewees. Gaining trust from participants is a challenge as a researcher (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). On the one hand, I feel that doing the data gathering (i.e. interviews) online, could have made the interactions with the interviewees more impersonal, and given that sensitive topics were discussed it could have influenced the level of trust in the conversation. On the other hand, the interviewees were able to perform the interview within a familiar environment, which could have counteracted the impersonal aspect of the interviews. Overall, I felt that the interviews went really well.

Some problems during the interviews included internet connection problems (from both ends) and in a few occasions, problems with the audio recording. Sometimes a few words or phrases from the recordings were inaudible. Nevertheless, this was very minimum and did not affect the analysis of the data.

Another challenge was that I had to do the research, data analysis, and writing at home. Luckily, I have the privilege to live in a place with a relatively calm environment for studying and stable internet connection. However, after more than a year of pandemic, and almost 6 months of curfew, things started to get difficult. I found it hard to motivate myself to work, which increased my feelings of stress and worry. Due to such circumstances, writing the thesis progressed more slowly than desired.

## **2.8 Ethical considerations**

Given that the topics being highly sensitive, there were important ethical considerations to take into account during the interviewing process. First, verbal consent was asked for permission to record (only audio) the interview before the interview started. Only if the permission was granted, the recording started. All the interviewees consented to this. Subsequently, I asked the interviewees whether they would be comfortable in sharing their name in the thesis, and all interviewees agreed to this. Moreover, before starting the interview, I reminded the interviewees that they had no obligation in answering any of the questions asked. So if they felt uncomfortable with the question or topic, or any other reason, they could make the decision

not to answer. Similarly, at the end of the interviews, I asked the interviewees how they felt throughout the interview. Lastly, I am the only person that had access to the recordings of the interviews and were stored securely.

## **Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework: Decolonial feminism and indigenous women movements**

Decolonial feminism is a movement that has emerged from the multifaceted, and intersectional struggles of women within different contexts because of colonialist, capitalist, and neoliberal influences (Espinosa Miñoso, 2016). This branch of feminism grapples with, and questions some of the central issues in today's feminist debates: from the universalism of women's issues, whiteness, and labeling, to dynamics of power and exclusion.

Decolonial feminism is not only helpful to understand the complex situations in which violence and oppression against indigenous women take place, but also to understand their insights and resistance. In this chapter, I will discuss some of the proposals and points of criticism towards dominant views of feminism that will be relevant for answering the research question in this thesis. Thus, I aim to show that Mexican indigenous women oppressions, movements, and resistance are multifaceted, varied, and should not be approached through a particular labeling system.

There have been many incredible influences on the topic of decoloniality and decolonial feminism. In this section, I delve into the work of some recognized authors in the field, such as Arruza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser (2019), María Lugones (2010), and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003). It is important to mention that while I aim to represent these authors' insights, they are still viewed through my own particular lens and interpretations.

### **3.1 Are 'women's issues' all women's issues?**

Feminist and women movements across history have been shaped in particular ways and have been recognized as a political-cultural revolution of 'modernity' and the 'advancement' of society (Espinosa Miñoso, 2016; Talpade Mohanty, 2003). Neoliberal thinking and narratives have influenced the way feminism is perceived and constituted (Arruza, Bhattacharya, & Fraser, 2019). For the most part, feminist agendas have focused on a number of priorities that constitute women's 'liberation' and 'empowerment', such as access to vote, sexual freedom, getting better jobs, and breaking the "glass ceiling", struggles that are characteristic of women from Western cultures (Dixon, 2011). Feminism as a revolutionary movement, has been understood—and desired—as a necessary movement for the liberation of *all* women (Espinosa

Miñoso, 2016). Nevertheless, as Arruza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser (2019) claim, this feminist agenda has forgotten to ask a crucial question: to who is this empowerment for and with what end? This process of questioning and challenging what is known as feminism today is a topic that is lacking attention and discussion.

One of the main troubles when talking about feminism is the idea that ‘women’s issues’ and struggles are identical and constant across different places in the world, when in fact, there are many movements within feminism that emerge in different contexts that are being ignored and neglected. Argentine feminist, philosopher, and activist María Lugones (2010) calls this the universalism of feminism, and refers to the idea that the feminist movement falls into a hegemonic grouping that does not consider other forms of practicing feminism. In this way, what is thought that oppresses a woman in a particular context, will not oppress another woman in the same way regardless of the context. Taking the example of domestic labor, this has been commonly criticized by Marxist feminism as a form of oppression that mystifies the role of women in society (Federici, 2004). And while this is—or has been—definitely true for some women across time and space, it is not fair to generalize it to other contexts. Angela Davis, in her famous book *Women, Race and Class* (1981), tells the story of Black women slaves’ liberation movements in the United States. She says:

It is true that domestic life took an exaggerated importance in the social lives of slaves, for it did indeed provide them with the only space where they could truly experience themselves as human beings. Black women, for this reason—and also because they were workers just like their men—were not debased by their domestic functions in the way that white women came to be (p. 13).

A few lines later, Davis (1981) says: “Domestic labor was the only meaningful labor for the slave community as a whole” (p. 14). Domestic labor, then, constituted for enslaved Black women a construction of agency that would be essential for the survival of the community, and later on, to their liberation.

Similarly, during our interview, Rosalinda shared with me her discomfort with the idea that she should not be allowed to have children just because some discourses of Western feminism claim that maternity is associated with the reproduction of the capital and patriarchal system. For instance, she explained:

What I do not agree with is that there is violence. What I do not agree with is also that women are violated. But if I decide, and want to have [a kid], and not necessarily with a partner, if I

want a child and I get pregnant, that does not mean that I am reproducing a patriarchy, because it is also up to me that I accompany him[/her] in this journey.<sup>2</sup>

Here Rosalinda claims that having children is not—and should not—necessarily be a form of violence that women are objected to. Rather, it should be a choice she makes as it would be a satisfactory experience for her. Not only because some women benefit from not having children does not mean that others would.

Moreover, it is often the case that the “triumphs” of feminism are also generalized to the ‘advancements’ of all women in society (Espinosa Miñoso, 2016). For instance, the case of suffrage in the United States of America. In the year of 1920 women in the United States were granted the right to vote. Nevertheless, this was only true for a section of women in society, as Black women were not allowed to vote until five decades later (Waxman, 2020). And yet, this phenomenon was seen, represented, and owned as a success for *all* women in the country (Espinosa Miñoso, 2016). Such dynamics result in one group of women benefiting more than others (Ochoa Muñoz, 2016). And those who benefit more are the Western, white, and/or middle-class groups of women.

What these examples demonstrate is that much of the feminist movement has denied or developed “blind spots” of any historical specificity of time and location. In other words, the struggles of women in different contexts and with multiple layers of complexity have not been considered. For instance, while some women desire to break the “glass ceiling”, for others this barrier does not even exist because the context they live in does not provide the necessary conditions and opportunities to experience it (Arruza, Bhattacharya, & Fraser, 2019). This does not mean there are not overlapping oppressions and struggles across women in different contexts, but it should not fall into assumptions and generalizations. This aspect was discussed in the interview with Aline. She explains:

From a type of feminism, it initially claimed that the reality of women was all the same, as an experience that, yes, in a sense it touches us all as women, but let's say that the specific context is different. And what we say is that it is not the same to be an urbanized, mestizo<sup>3</sup> woman who

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<sup>2</sup> Original part of transcription: Yo con lo que no estoy de acuerdo es que haya violencia. Lo que no estoy de acuerdo también es que sean violentadas las mujeres. Pero si yo decido y quiero tener, y no a fuerza que tenga una pareja o digo yo, quiero un hijo y me embarazo, eso no quiere decir que estoy reproduciendo un patriarcado, porque también es de mí que yo lo acompañe en este caminar.

<sup>3</sup> *Mestizo* refers to individuals with European and Indigenous descent, which after the Mexican revolution became synonymous with Mexican identity, erasing, discursively, the existence of indigenous communities.



has access to certain things, than being a migrant woman, a single mother, or an indigenous woman who cares about the community.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, feminist struggles and movements are not, and should not, be generalizable into singular and unified experiences. And this is particularly true when understanding indigenous feminism or indigenous women movements. When this is not taken into consideration, it results in dynamics of exclusion and marginalization within the feminist movement. In this way, women are being isolated by the movement that aims to represent them.

### 3.2 Can feminism be colonizing?

The generalization of the feminist movements is not only exclusionary in the fact that it does not take other contexts and realities into account, but it can also fall into colonializing and racist practices. The idea that women are constituted as a coherent group based only on the basis of particular economic and political oppressions is socially and historically reductive (Talpade Mohanty, 2003). In this way, it is not only that other struggles and feminist movements go unnoticed, but it *purposely* ignores the multiple factors, or ‘layers’ that constitute the experiences of violence and resistance of other women, such as indigenous women. This results in a colonizing logic in which the dominant or powerful feminist discourse takes a role on deciding which movements are heard.

Then, a new problem emerges. Any women’s movement that does not follow the dominant discourse—namely, the Western—leads to, as Talpade Mohanty (2003) suggests, “the construction of a similarly reductive and homogenous notion of what I call the “Third World Difference”—that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries” (p. 19). Hence, it is this purposeful act of looking away from the experiences of women in ‘Third World’ countries that has led to an assumption that all their struggles are the same. This homogeneity, then,

[P]roduces the image of an “average Third World woman”. This average Third World woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained)

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<sup>4</sup> Original part of transcript: Desde un tipo de feminismo se planeaba de entrada que la realidad de las mujeres era toda la misma, como una vivencia que, sí, en un sentido nos toca a todas como género, pero digamos que el contexto concreto es distinto. Y lo que decimos ahora siempre, no es lo mismo ser una mujer mestiza, urbanizada que tiene acceso a ciertas cosas que una mujer migrante o madre soltera, o una mujer indígena que lo que le importa es la comunidad.

and her being “Third World” (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This [...] is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions (Talpade Mohanty, 2003, p. 22).

What this suggests is that the stereotypical ideas and assumptions about Third World women sense of self and experiences are bound to and defined by their Western counterparts, creating a binary division of the “power-less” and the “power-full”. Henceforth, this definition of the Third Women as a homogenous group is focused on their sense of “powerlessness” rather than on their sense of action. In other words, Third World women become defined by their state of oppression and victimization, ultimately robbing them their historical and political agency (Talpade Mohanty, 2003).

This binary logic in Western feminist is not only of discursive quality, but it also transcends into other disciplines, such as academia. For example, Rosalinda and Eitelia shared during the interviews their views on this aspect by stating that women in academia could marginalize or make their movements appear less valuable because of the idea that indigenous women “do not know” how to organize and exercise their rights. And it is because of this that within academic texts, women are defined as victims of male, colonial, and/or economic violence (Talpade Mohanty, 2003). In addition to this, the lack of representation and misrepresentation of Third World feminisms adds to this binary and exclusionary logic. This has put Western scholars in a privileged and powerful position that further reduces the experience of women in different contexts. Women, then, remain frozen in a temporal-spatial domain, as if their position as “victims of oppression” is fixed and ever-lasting (Brown, 2019, as cited in Guardian News, 2019; Talpade Mohanty, 2003).

Another important implication of this power play of dominant discourses of feminism is the imposition of “correct” ways of doing feminism (Talpade Mohanty, 2003). For instance, as Aline said, there are occasions in which some women that claim ‘more’ knowledge and ‘insight’ of feminism and then believe that they can ‘teach’ those insights to women in communities, thus being an imposition of knowledge that is a racist act. This is a result, again, from the overgeneralizations of what constitutes the feminist movement around the world. When there is a lack of understanding of the necessities, goals, and ways of organizing of a particular group of women within a given context, then it risks falling into a power hierarchy. Thereby, for example, Eitelia, Rosalinda, and Aline shared that some indigenous women from Oaxaca prioritize the collective subject and community values.

### 3.3 Should we even call it feminism?

There have been debates under the label “feminist” (Talpade Mohanty, 2003). The exclusionary, and ultimately racist, practices of feminism have led women, such as Rosalinda, to not identify with feminism as a movement for social and political change. However, it should not be the label that matters, but the actions. For example, many of the women I interviewed (i.e. Nancy, Astrid, Eitelia, Rosalinda, Aline, and Beatriz) told that they, or other of their comrades, were not familiar with the label of feminism, but nevertheless, they felt that they were participating in social and political change within their community, even without a self-description as a feminist. Some of them have decided to represent themselves as feminists or follow the branch of community feminism, while others have decided not to identify with feminism. Regardless of the decision, the attention should be directed to the actions to avoid simplification and exclusion.

During the interview with América, she shared an important insight regarding labeling. She said:

The word as such "activist", to me sounds quite reduced, it is very pragmatic, it falls very short. I think that today we have to be more... we have to take care of our words. It is very practical to say: "I am a social activist", but it seems to me that, yes we are, but above all I believe that this requires more depth: we are defenders of rights, we are defenders of the territory, defenders of the land, defenders of life.<sup>5</sup>

América’s comment is insightful for understanding the importance of locating the experiences and resistances of indigenous women. Labels such as ‘activist’ or ‘feminist’ may already be generalizing their specific fights and struggles. In this way, it is also important to take into account the context and call women for who they are and what they fight for.

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<sup>5</sup> Original part of transcript: La palabra así como tal “activista”, para mí suena bastante reducida, es muy pragmática, se queda muy corta. Creo que hoy día tenemos que ser como más... incluso cuidar las palabras. Es muy práctico decir: “yo soy activista social”, pero me parece que, somos eso, sí, pero sobre todo yo creo que profundizando somos más defensores de derechos, somos defensores del territorio, defensoras de la tierra, defensoras de la vida.

### 3.4 Towards an intersectional view on feminism and social activism

Then, how is it possible to approach and understand the struggles and resistances of indigenous women in Mexico? To do this, it is necessary to consider the multiple factors that traverse the struggles of marginalized communities, which can be explained through the theory of intersectionality by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989). Crenshaw coined this term in 1989 to delve into the experiences of Black women in the United States when talking about racial and sexual discrimination (Coaston, 2019). She argues that law and policy discourses tend to analyze discrimination against Black women from mutually exclusive categories of analysis. Under this logic, then, Black women are discriminated either because they are Black or because they are female, but what the law forgets is that their ethnic and gender identity intersect in complex ways that give rise to discrimination. In other words, discrimination against Black women emerges from the experience of being black *and* being a woman (Crenshaw, 1989).

Factors that intersect in the experience of marginalization and discrimination can be varied and can change through time. Some examples include: ethnic identity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, migration background, religion, disability, language, age, and education level (Bolding, 2020). The list goes on, but what is important to remember is that someone's oppression cannot be simplified into exclusionary categories of analysis. Instead, the combination of these factors is what brings discriminatory experiences into an individual.

Similarly, the combination of intersections should not be the only aspect to be considered when understanding oppressions and discriminations. Context and historical background will have a high influence in how these intersections come to be. For instance, a White, middle-class cisgender lesbian will not experience the same level of systematic oppression as a Black cisgender lesbian from a low economic class (Bolding, 2020). There are specific historical and contextual factors in relation to the two identities that make their experiences completely different.

In the case of indigenous women in Mexico, particularly the states of Oaxaca, Veracruz, and State of Mexico, some of the factors that intersect them include their gender, ethnic identity or belongingness to an indigenous community, socioeconomic status, and language. Such factors have come to imply a legitimate source of oppression, violence, and discrimination due to the historical context of the country.

The theory of intersectionality cannot only be applied to understanding the level of oppression that indigenous women experience. With intersectionality, it is possible to also understand their social movements and resistances. Indigenous women movements emerge from the intersections that oppress them, and these movements and resistances are expressed at different levels of social life. In other words, it is not only that an indigenous woman will solely participate in social protests, or organized movements (Talpade Mohanty, 2003). Instead, their resistance will be present at different levels of interaction, such as self-identity, family, and daily-life activities. In this sense, feminism and social movements are multifaceted, varied, and context dependent. Understanding indigenous feminism or indigenous women movements thus require to be analyzed through a complex interplay of various factors and intersections.

### **3.5 Understanding indigenous women movements through a decolonial lens**

Overall, questioning and challenging the hegemonic views of feminism and women's movements is not only important, but necessary. It is only through a process of openness, not falling into traps of the dominant and normalized discourses, and breaking through the established narratives, that change will be possible.

Thus, indigenous feminism or indigenous women movements cannot be generalized into a homogenous group with consistent oppressions and liberations. Just as it is not fair to define Western feminism into coherent groups, indigenous women's struggles, movements, and resistances cannot be reduced in such way either (Talpade Mohanty, 2003). Considering the different intersections in their respective historical context is therefore necessary to understand indigenous women oppressions, and as a result, resistances. In the following chapters, I will discuss the history of settler colonialism in Mexico and how this has led indigenous women to experience structural and symbolic racist, sexist, and classist violence.

## **Chapter 4. The Context: History and memory**

To understand the process in which violence and subalternity is inflicted into indigenous women from Mexico, it is necessary to consider its historical context. In the case of Mexico, the process of colonization has been one of—if not the main—explanations for the oppression that indigenous women in Mexico experience up until this day. Colonization has produced racial, sexist, and classist ideologies that have led to the economic, cultural, and political marginalization of indigenous women (Talpade Mohanty, 2003). As mentioned in the previous chapter, considering the historical construction of hegemonic power is essential for understanding oppressions, and in turn, resistances. Forgetting the history of oppression could lead to a simplistic or depthless analysis. Therefore, in this chapter, I will delve into one of the darkest and most heartbreaking times in the history of Mexico.

### **4.1 The beginning of the end: “discovery”, conquest, and colonization**

The conquest of Mexico begins with the arrival of the Spanish at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The first event took place in 1492 when Cristóbal Colón, a traveler, went out in search to reach India in order to acquire new knowledge, expand their territory and religion, and obtain material goods such as gold (Dussel, 1992). Instead, he arrived at the American continent in a small island called Guanahani. This moment has been known as the “discovery” of the Americas, albeit he never knew it was a continent different than Asia that he reached (Rinke, 2014; Dussel, 1992).

The “discoveries” of Cristóbal Colón set the path for new travelers to follow his lead, opening the way for the process of conquest to take place. In 1519, Hernan Cortés arrives to the coast of Veracruz with the objective to invade the Mexican territory (Dussel, 1992). What follows is a disproportionately violent course of events against the indigenous peoples. The conquest, as a military and political practice, served to attribute dominance positions over indigenous communities. As Enrique Dussel (1992) has suggested, this was the beginning of the conceptualization of “the Other” who is forced, submerged, and alienated to totality. The indigenous individual would then become an instrument that can be dominated and oppressed: the inferior Other. As the Spaniards called it at that time, this was the beginning of modernity (Dussel, 1992).

The politico-military oppression was a continuous development. Cortés, together with his troops, used the enslaved of African-descent and indigenous individuals from the Tlaxcala group to invade his way through the City of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec empire (Anzaldúa, 1987). After long and violent battles, Moctezuma, the Aztec emperor, had no choice other than surrender. Eventually, the 13<sup>th</sup> of August of 1521, Cortés takes over Tenochtitlan and the Aztec empire had come to an end (Dussel, 1992). During this process, and the years that followed, thousands of indigenous peoples were brutally killed: both by the Spanish soldiers and by a devastating smallpox epidemic. Before the conquest, there were 25 million indigenous individuals, and by 1650, the population declined by 95% (Anzaldúa, 1987; Federici, 2004; Dussel, 1992).

After the fall of the Aztec empire, Mexico and its indigenous peoples were not being conquered, but *colonized*. Colonization implies a process of imposing customs, politics, and economic systems by the colonizers into the colonized, with the purpose of controlling and assimilate the “difference” (i.e. the Other) to “the same” (Dussel, 1992). This process of assimilation was extremely violent and was characterized by the idea that it was the path to progress and modernity. The territory was renamed to “New Spain” and the Spaniards forbid the indigenous peoples to practice their culture, including language, religion, and sociopolitical organization. In other words, their autonomy, agency, and identity were snatched from their hands (Anzaldúa, 1987).

#### **4.2 Colonization of the female body**

The time of the conquest and colonization was not only a violent process from a political, cultural, and military point of view, but an erotic violence, a domination of the woman’s body (Dussel, 1992). Then, not only the territory was conquered, the woman’s body became another ‘territory’ to be conquered, to be dominated, and to be controlled. Women were not only the inferior Other, but also the sexual Other. Indigenous women were sexually abused and enslaved by the conquerors (Dorronsoro, 2013). Sexual encounters between the Spaniards and indigenous women took place in the form of rape (Talpade Mohanty, 2003). Moreover, they were forced, against their will, to marry the soldiers and the politicians. Women would be ‘delivered’ to the conquerors so they could abuse and dominate them. Milantzin, the lover of Cortés, became *La Chingada*—the fucked one—a symbol that represents the violations women

experienced during this time (Franco, 1999; Dussel, 1992). Here, a *machista* and patriarchal system is established, the masculine ideal and necessity to exert power.

One of the direct consequences of such violations was the emergence of a new “race”: the *mestizo*—a mix of indigenous and Spanish blood (Anzaldúa, 1987; Belausteguigoitia, 2001; Trejo & Altamirano, 2016). That is where the *hijo de la chingada* (the son of the fucked one) and the *criollo* (the European born in colonized land) emerged. Mestizaje was used, once again, as an assimilation practice, and additionally as a strategy to create ethnic hierarchies within society (Figueroa, 2011; Dussel, 1992). The course of mestizaje advanced rapidly, that by 1810, 40% of the population was mestizo (Martínez Cortes & Rangel Villalobos, 2013). The colonization of indigenous women’s bodies represented an embodiment of power by the colonial service, which led to the maintenance of strong racial and sexual divisions.

### 4.3 Capitalism

Another powerful system that has perpetrated social inequalities within Mexico during and after the conquest is capitalism. Capitalism emerged after feudalism as a political-economic system that endorsed private ownership of land and material goods, and in line with Marxist theory, the commodity of the labor force (Semo, 1993; Federici, 2004). This transformation supposes, and at the same time, produces a dispossession (legal or illegal) from the part of the Spaniards of lands belonging to the indigenous peoples (Bazant, 1950).

The most prominent capitalist business during the colonial era was mining. The Spaniards used mining for the extraction of silver, as well as an incentive for the exploration and colonization of new territories (Langue, 1991). The silver extraction process required mills (to shred the material), machinery to extract water and big installations, which was placed within the indigenous territory, together with the labor force of indigenous individuals (including men, women, and children) and enslaved individuals from Africa that were exploited through cheap (or even free) labor (Bazant, 1950; Dussel, 1992). Other capitalist activities involved the agriculture sector, including farming and the cultivation of sugar cane (Bazant, 1950). This would, in turn, imply the imposition of an economic culture and control of the territory and the people living in it.

During this time, Spaniards rose to the top of the socio-economic hierarchy, sending the indigenous population, together with the enslaved populations of African descent, to the



bottom of the scale (Trejo & Altamirano, 2016). It is in this moment when ‘race’ or ethnic identity becomes a tool used within capitalism. These hierarchies, rooted in classist and racial domination, served to structure and legitimize the division of labor (Hudis, 2018). In other words, capitalism uses differences between people, such as ethnic identification, to justify the exploitation of some people over others. Additionally, this is mystified: it creates the illusion to make exploitation seem “natural”, as if certain individuals were meant to perform specific jobs. Therefore, capitalism was—and still is—a fundamentally race-based system.

In addition to the racist component in capitalism, a sexist component came hand in hand. Women were one of the most affected groups of this process. Italian and American scholar Silvia Federici (2004) critiques and expands Marx’s theory of capitalism through a feminist interpretation and proposed that there was a part of waged labor that remained unspoken: women’s labor. She implies that Marx understood labor in terms of its production but did not pay attention to the reproductive side of it. Capitalism endorsed the reproduction of labor, namely, the transformation of women’s bodies into “baby machines” that reproduce and take care of the worker, the man. This reproduction of labor was unpaid and performed in the home, where women faded into the background and became invisible. Yet, it was a necessary and crucial support for the production of waged labor. In parallel, the capital system mystified the reproduction of labor as a “natural” characteristic of women and endorsed the idea that women were inherently inferior to men (Federici, 2004). In this way, Marxist ideologies ignored the fact that a new patriarchal order that systematically excluded women from waged labor and subordinated them socially was emerging (Talpade Mohanty, 2003).

In the case of indigenous women in Mexico, they were reduced to the domestic space, where they must assume the responsibilities of the home and family, including raising children (Paillacar, 2017). In cases when indigenous women were permitted to work, mostly it was also within the domestic sphere. It has been registered that since colonial times, indigenous women were enforced to perform tasks such as cooking, washing, babysitting, and cleaning (Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, 2016). The conditions of this job were hostile since they were exposed to a prolonged working day without rests, received little remuneration in return, and suffered all kinds of (sexual) violence. This does not only demonstrate the sexual division of labor, but the feminization of domestic labor that was presented in Mexico, thus leading to the emergence of the mystified notions of motherhood, domesticity, and housewife (Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, 2016; Federici, 2004).

#### 4.4 The post-colonial era: Independence and Revolution

The War of Independence (1810-1821) was the process of liberation from the colonial influences of the Spaniards. This movement seemed to be the light at the end of the tunnel for liberty from the stratification consequences of the colonial past. Nevertheless, colonialist and capitalist logics remained intact (Ruiz, 2002). For example, racial and phenotypical differences continued to have an important role in post-Independence society. The European phenotype continued to be associated with power, progress, and modernity, while dark-brown indigenous characteristics were represented as backward (Trejo & Altamirano, 2016).

This mindset and strategy continued throughout the years. During the Mexican Revolution at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, post-revolutionary elites engaged in a process of nation-building with the goal of having a single national *mestizo* identity. The post-revolutionary elites considered that through *mestizaje*, Mexico would achieve a national identity characterized by development, progress, and modernity (Ruiz, 2002; Mijangos Díaz & López Torres, 2011). In response to this, the Mexican government conducted a series of projects with an 'indigenous' character. This became known as the *problema indígena* ("the indigenous problem"), in which the 'solution' depended on the cultural and social integration of the indigenous population into the new independent national identity. The 'solution' revolved around the premise that *para ser mexicano hay que mestizarse* (to be Mexican you have to be mixed), a policy that, as Alicia Castellanos (1994, as cited in Gall, 2004) claimed, tried to "subsume the diversity of indigenous identities into an ideal of progressive whitening" (p. 243). Thus, *mestizaje* constituted the elimination of the indigenous identity. This indigenous project took place during the 1920s and 1930s and resulted in an exponential increase of *mestizo* population (Trejo & Altamirano, 2016; Gall, 2004; Ruiz, 2002; Mijangos Díaz & López Torres, 2011).

The assimilation of the indigenous populations did not only occur in racial terms, but also in the cultural aspect. The idea of the modern nation was compatible with the need of reaching a linguistic, cultural, and educational unity. The new independent, post-revolutionary State redefined the prototypes of the "ideal citizen", based on notions of modernity. This 'modern' citizen was achieved not only through racial assimilation, but also through a process of acculturation (Mijangos Díaz & López Torres, 2011). This meant that indigenous populations had to resign to their languages and traditions (Gall, 2004; Trejo & Altamirano,

2016; Ruiz, 2002). Policies in education were developed to ‘educate’ indigenous populations through the teaching of Spanish and civic and moral values. Additionally, certain recreational activities, such as music, literature, and cinema, were imposed into the indigenous populations as part of this assimilation process (Mijangos Díaz & López Torres, 2011).

The process of mestizaje in women served as the representation of a national symbol. The role of the mestizo woman turned into the ideal: the ‘perfect’ mix between indigenous and European. The post-revolutionary state uses women’s bodies as a symbol of national identity: one that balances tradition and modernity (Ruiz, 2002). Thus, an authentic ideal of the country is constituted, with one foot in modernity and another in tradition.

In the case of indigenous women, during the mestizo process, they were continuously devalued. They were considered less qualified for education than men, as if they were not capable for the integration and assimilation procedure. For this reason, they believed to be ‘trapped’ in tradition and they were blamed for making the nation look less “advanced” (Gall, 2004). Nevertheless, the State took advantage of this opportunity to refer to indigenous women as carriers of traditional Mexican culture (Ruiz, 2002). As a consequence, customs, rituals, and other forms of ‘artistic’ expression of indigenous culture were incorporated into the category of Mexican “folklore”. All of this was used as an appropriation strategy to enhance the national ego into a coherent notion of *Mexicanness* (Mijangos Díaz & López Torres, 2011). At the same time, indigenous women are placed at the lowest link in society (Ruiz, 2002). This, I argue, represents the paradox of Mexican nationalism: while indigenous women are praised for their role as bearers of culture and tradition, at the same time, are discriminated against with the idea that this ‘traditional’ aspect is what puts them down, fixating them in a position of social, political, and economic immobility.

Throughout the years, the segregation of indigenous peoples, especially women, continued to be based on ethnic identity and culture, with the constant strive for ‘development’ and ‘modernity’ (Trejo & Altamirano, 2016). The situation of indigenous women in Mexico has only increased in complexity and has led to the development of specific ways of violence grounded on stereotypical notions. This violence expresses in all facets of indigenous women lives and have reached a worrying level of normalization. Therefore, in the following chapter, I will describe and consider how systematic and structural violence, expressed in terms of sexism, racism, political, and economic violence, has been maintained and perpetrated by different sectors of society.

## Chapter 5. Open wounds and unhealed scars

Today, more than 500 years have passed of violence against indigenous women in Mexico. Today, after more than 500 years, this violence maintains the same worrying and heartbreaking proportion. And today, Mexico faces a denial of the country's historical past. The violent effects of colonialism, such as racism, sexism, misogyny, and repression, have been believed to be "things of the past" or "things of other countries". But the reality is different. The colonial era and what came after has a painful and persistent legacy. It has left open wounds and unhealed scars that have to be treated with care and attention.

Indigenous women in Mexico have experienced various forms of violence that differentiates them into the Other. This exclusionary way of thinking when making dualistic oppositions, creates, as Italian philosopher and feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti (1994) suggests, sub-categories of otherness, which come to mean to be *worth* less than other individuals. In this way, the indigenous woman is not only the Other, but the sexual, racial, and political other. These expressions of violence marginalize and crosses through every aspect of a woman's life and has said to represent a serious human rights crisis (Duyos, 2019). Indigenous women, as a minority group within the country, are exposed to a larger scale of violence for the defense of rights than the rest of the Mexican population.

Therefore, it is necessary (and desired) to talk about and reveal the urgency and severity of this problem. In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate the severity and disproportionate degree of violence inflicted against indigenous women, as well as the urgency to pay attention to these processes in order to stop with the perpetration of such violence. The intention is to explicitly name the types of violence against indigenous women and giving them the historical and social density they deserve (Gall, 2004). Moreover, showing how violence against indigenous women is manifested and perpetrated will be useful to understand the resistances and insights of indigenous women that help the fight against structural and symbolic violence.

### 5.1 Gendered and sexist violence

Patriarchal and misogynist violence initiated by a colonial and capitalist hegemony is translated into different forms of gendered violence (Varela Huerta, 2019). Despite the fact that centuries have passed since Mexico self-proclaimed as independent of colonial influences, the gaze and

treatment towards women is still extremely colonial and masculine, with practices that appropriate the subjective and bodily agency of women (Ruiz, 2002). As mentioned in the previous chapter, this appropriation of women's body implies the idea that women can be "defeated, dominated and disciplined, that is, placed in a position of subordination and obedience" (Segato, 2016, p. 19).

One of the ways that gendered violence is manifested against indigenous women is through stereotypes. The influence of capitalism in the process of the domestic space as intimate and private led to the development of certain stereotypes associated with women. This topic was frequently discussed during the interviews with the women. For instance, Nancy, Evitelia, and Beatriz shared that in Oaxaca, some of the most prominent stereotypes associated with indigenous women are related to the social roles that are ascribed to them, such as taking care of the house (i.e. cooking, childrearing, and cleaning), getting married, and having children. Similarly, Astrid shared that, in Oteapan, Veracruz, much of this domestic work was performed around the needs and gratification of the men. Astrid shared how this dynamic has happened within her family:

[We had] a big family. My grandmother had 6 children. My mum was the second oldest [sister], and she had to serve coffee before sitting down [to eat]. And then she could never eat, because since she was the woman, she was the one that had to serve all her little brothers. It does not matter that my uncle, the eldest, may be old and could do it, but since he is a man, he does not have to do it. [...] I mean, those things were funny, but still... it's funny, but at the same time she couldn't even sit down to eat, because she had to be serving all her little brothers. [...] It did not matter that there was another older brother [...]. And they did not see it as a bad thing because it was normalized.<sup>6</sup>

As it can be seen, the stereotypes associated to some indigenous women of Oaxaca and Veracruz shape how they are expected to behave. This is not only normalized, but it can affect other aspects of their lives. For example, Nancy commented that, in some occasions, indigenous women will not have access to education, due to the belief that a woman's *only* 'destiny' is to get married and comply to doing housework. Another consequence includes the

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<sup>6</sup> Original part of transcript: Fue una familia grande, mi abuela tuvo 6 hijos. Luego mi mamá, antes de sentarse, como mi mamá era la segunda de la mayor, tenía que servir café. Y luego ella nunca podía comer porque ella era la mujer y era la de que "ah, sírvele a todos tus hermanitos". No importa que mi tío, el mayor, igual ya esté grande y él lo puede hacer, pero como pues es hombre no lo hace. [...] O sea, esas cosas son chistosas, pero igual... es chistoso pero a la vez ella no podía ni sentarse a comer, ¿por qué? Porque tenía que estar sirviendo a todos sus hermanitos. [...] No importaba que había otro hermano mayor. [...] Pues te digo, y no lo veían tan malo porque ya estaba normalizado.

lack of access to job opportunities. This suggests and supports the discourse that women *belong* to the private, rather than the public, sphere.

It is important to note what Beatriz told me during our interview: the idea that those women who comply to these roles and stereotypes are the representatives of the “good women”. That is, those who perform behaviors in line with social norms will be accepted in society. American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler (1996) proposes that this is given through a patriarchal frame in which bodies are materialized into a feminine vs. masculine binary and defines what society finds acceptable. In other words, there are dominant powers, in this case a patriarchal one, that remunerates sociological norms that force individuals to adhere to them. This is where her concept of “bodies that matter” makes sense: women, as being materialized into what femininity is thought to represent, begin to matter only when it adheres to the dominant power. This further explains why behaviors and ideas that deviate from those norms are highly criticized and unappreciated. If patriarchy as the hegemonic power does not keep getting re-iterated it is threatened and loses its effect of power (Butler, 1996). Therefore, as Rosalinda and Evitelia expressed, the patriarchal model is a system of control and domination that keeps women in oppression.

Gender-based violence against women in Mexico is expressed in an extreme way through practices of rape, kidnapping, and femicide: the misogynist killing of women. (Misra, 2015). This has been a complex, but recurrent phenomenon affecting women all across the country. Cases of femicide have increased alarmingly in recent decades (Duyos, 2019). In 2020, 969 cases of femicide were registered, reaching the highest figure since 2015 (Aristegui Noticias, 2021). It should be noted that femicides in urbanized areas are registered more frequently due to an active neglect from the media to include the femicides of indigenous women (Lugo, 2020). Still, within the registered cases, 97% of them are left unpunished (Iribarne, 2015; Pérez Osorio, 2020).

The role of the authorities in these cases of sexual violence and femicide, instead of alleviating the effects, worsens them. For example, Aline narrated her experience with the governor of Oaxaca and his reaction towards a case of femicide:

The governor, for example, told us about a 15-year-old girl from a community nearby, that took a taxi, and disappeared. Afterwards her body was found... it was horrific. And together with a group of women we went with the governor to support the case. However, this is what he said about the girl: "Well, [...] we got into her networks, and she had 3 or 4 boyfriends." [I thought]:

so what?! I mean, she could have 100 [boyfriends] if she wanted to. The officials, the governors, they only care about how many partners one has, sexual partners. [But] is that a reason to kill her? Did it represent a “kill me” statement? [...] The idea is that women deserve or we deserve a disappearance, rape, murder, because of the conditions of going out, or of being in places that do not belong to us, that do not correspond to us. So, I think there is no real understanding or awareness of what is happening as a society.<sup>7</sup>

Aline demonstrates how members of the government use discourses to shift the responsibility of the violent act towards the woman. She will be questioned upon topics that are not related to her experience of violence. This, to justify and legitimize the acts against her. Similarly, there has been the case that during detention procedures, it is the same members of the government (e.g. police or state agents) that inflict sexual violence against women (Duyos, 2019).

## 5.2 Racist violence

As seen in the previous section, gender violence is one of the types of violence that crosses the lives of indigenous women. To this is now added racist violence, further creating new struggles and oppressions. Racism is based on practices of inferiorization and exclusion of the racial Other that supports the belief that there are inherent characteristics to people than make them inferior to others (Gall, 2004). Racist expressions towards indigenous peoples originate from the segregation of ethnic identity produced during the colony. One of the most devastating consequences of the assimilation process throughout the history of Mexico is how the assimilation projects were described and presented. The post-revolutionary elite led society believe that the assimilation policies were *inclusive*, when in fact, it was an undoubtedly exclusionary practice. Since then, racist actions have been undervalued and unrecognized by society and governmental institutions (Machuca, 1994, as cited in Gall, 2004).

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<sup>7</sup> Original part of transcript: El gobernador, por ejemplo, nos decía respecto a una chica de 15 años de una comunidad aquí cerca, se subió a un taxi colectivo, y fue desaparecida. Después se encuentra su cuerpo... bueno, fue un espanto. Y fuimos con el gobernador un grupo de mujeres por ella y por muchísimas otras, pero sobre ella nos dijo él: “bueno, lo que pasa es que nos metimos a sus redes, y la chica tenía 3 o 4 novios”. [...] ¡¿Y eso qué?! O sea, podría tener 100 si quiere. Y eso, los funcionarios, los gobernadores, cuántas parejas tienen, parejas sexuales, y ¿por eso los van a matar? ¿es una declaración de “mátanme”? [...] La idea es que las mujeres se merecen o nos merecemos una desaparición, una violación, el asesinato, por las condiciones de salir, o de estar en lugares que no nos toca, que no nos corresponde. Entonces, creo que no hay un entendimiento de verdad, una conciencia de qué es lo que está pasando como sociedad.

Consequently, the issue of racism is normalized and denied at a large scale by the Mexican society. Nevertheless, as Nancy expressed, racism is all around:

From the simple fact of being indigenous, from the simple fact of being a woman, from the way you dress, from the way you speak, from how you express yourself [...]. Racism is everywhere, regardless of whether it is within a community, but also in the city itself, in the capital. Racism occurs everywhere.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, racism is present and constant within the Mexican society, and it is manifested and perpetrated through various factors and discourses. On one hand, racism in Mexico arises from visual factors, such as darker skin color and clothing. On the other hand, aspects such as speaking an indigenous language is also a source for discrimination (Belausteguigoitia, 2001). For indigenous women, these aspects come to mean an inferior position in society. These characteristics are associated with undesired behaviors, such as laziness, delinquency, and unintelligence, as discussed in the interviews with Astrid, Aline, Eitelia, Erica, and Beatriz.

Some of the direct consequences of such racist stereotypes is within the sectors of employment, health, and government institutions. First, in the employment sector, indigenous women experience difficulties more often to get a job because of how they look like. For instance, as Astrid said, “they employ someone with blue eyes more [...] just because I have brown skin”.<sup>9</sup> In other cases, when indigenous women access to employment, they are expected to do *certain* jobs. As Eitelia expressed, “sometimes they let the women do the cleaning, wash or iron.”<sup>10</sup> This shows how being recognized in the labor sector as a woman and as indigenous makes it difficult to access certain benefits.

Secondly, indigenous women, due to their gender and indigenous community identity face highly discriminatory practices within the health institutions. For example, Nancy shared with me that she wanted to give birth to her baby in the hospital of her hometown. When she went to request this to the hospital, the nurses denied her request without a legitimate explanation, regardless of the fact that, in Mexico, access to health is a basic right. Nancy felt upset and powerless at this situation. Moreover, health institutions often abuse of their power

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<sup>8</sup> Original part of transcript: Desde el simple hecho de ser indígena, desde el simple hecho de ser mujer, desde la forma en que vistes, desde la forma en que hablas, desde cómo te expresas [...]. El racismo está en todos lados, independientemente de que sea una comunidad, sino también en la propia ciudad se da, en la capital. En todos lados se da el racismo.

<sup>9</sup> Original part of transcript: emplean más a alguien con ojos azules [...] solamente por tener piel morena.

<sup>10</sup> Original part of transcript: A veces le dan que sean las mujeres que hagan la limpieza, que vayan a lavar o a planchar.



to manipulate decisions concerning the bodies of indigenous women. For example, there are cases in which health institutions apply intrauterine devices without the woman's consent, therefore revealing the misogynist beliefs and the power that society has over women's bodies (Díaz, 2015).

Thirdly, the way indigenous women are treated at governmental institutions reveal a strong structural violence. Particularly, when indigenous women ask for support to the authorities, the treatment they receive is degrading. As Eitelia said:

When indigenous women arrive at the institution, they are violated because they are not listened to. If they don't speak Spanish, they won't even put a person there to... a translator [...]. Justice never comes, because [women] are the last priority because they are indigenous. [Indigenous women] do not access justice the same way as a person who is not purely indigenous does.<sup>11</sup>

In this way, it is through powerful institutions that maintain and perpetrate sexist and racist practices.

Furthermore, the media plays a significant role in the maintenance, perpetration, and normalization of violence against indigenous women. As América said, multimedia mass companies in Mexico, such as TV Azteca and Televisa are generators of symbolic violence, in where racist, sexist, and classist stereotypes of indigenous women are perpetrated.

Racist violence against indigenous women has not only denied them participation from different social activities, but it has also implied a loss of their cultural expressions. From the loss of indigenous languages to the abandonment of traditional clothing and traditional ways of harvesting. The influences from the colony have caused, as Astrid and Beatriz expressed, that some indigenous individuals, both men and women, feel ashamed of their own past and customs. On top of this, they have been affected with a fear of raising their voices and expressing themselves without being devalued.

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<sup>11</sup> Original part of transcript: Las mujeres indígenas cuando llegan a la institución se les violenta porque no se les escucha. Si no hablan el español ni siquiera le ponen a una persona que esté ahí para que... un traductor. No se le pone [...]. La justicia nunca llega, porque ellas a lo último quedan ellos y ellas quedan al último por ser indígenas. No acceden a la justicia como accede una persona que no es netamente indígena.

### 5.3 Political violence

Another form of violence that occurs against indigenous communities has to do with the use—and un-use—of policies, laws, and rights. The government, as an institution that exercises control and administration of power, has had an important role in perpetrating social inequalities. The Mexican State has a history of political leaders that have been criticized for their inability to establish a dynamic where the rights of indigenous communities are fulfilled and exercised in a correct and efficient way (Martínez Espinoza, 2012). Mainly, indigenous communities across the country have expressed their discontent with the continuity of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) in power for as long as 70 years. This political party rose to power between the years 1930 and 2000, obtaining centralized power at the governmental, municipal, and state level. The political decisions and actions have been questioned for its inability to promote a democratic system (Ontiveros, 2019; Duyos, 2019). Sadly, even with the decline of the PRI, Mexico still contains a system that enhances policies and laws motivated by corruption.

One of the most worrying problems related to the judicial and legislative systems in Mexico is the lack of compliance with the current laws. Mexico has outstanding and detailed law and rights documents, yet, paradoxically, these are not exercised as they should (Martínez Espinoza, 2012). For example, Eitelia and Érica explained during the interviews that the law states that indigenous women have the right to take part in the political system and that there must be women in political positions. Nevertheless, it is often the case that only one of few women are given the job, and it is often a man behind her who makes the decisions. Likewise, Aline pointed out that the government has created laws against gender violence to guarantee security and justice towards the integrity of women. Yet, as she expressed:

The role that [the government] has had has been not only inoperative or being negligent, I also believe that it has a passive role [...]. There is not only negligence, but also an active participation in building impunity. So, how could we encourage others to go with the government to report cases if nothing is going to happen?<sup>12</sup>

A few moments later, Aline continued expressing that, for indigenous women, this struggle multiplies since it is already hard for them to access the judicial institutions in the first place.

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<sup>12</sup> Original part of transcript: El papel que ha tenido ha sido más de ser inoperante, más que ser negligente, yo creo también que su papel es de pasividad [...]. No solamente hay negligencia, sino también una participación activa en construir la impunidad. Entonces, ¿con qué cara vamos con organizaciones a decir “denunciemos, judicialicemos casos”, si no va a pasar nada?

The public ministry is approximately 2 hours away from her community, and often women worry about the expenses involved in a judicial process. In this way, albeit there are laws and rights that supposedly guarantee their safety, the access to justice is almost non-existent.

The second article of the Mexican constitution recognizes 10 rights of indigenous communities: 1) right to recognition as an indigenous people or community, 2) right to self-description, 3) right to autonomy, 4) right to self-determination, 5) right to apply their internal regulatory systems, 6) right to the preservation of cultural identity, 7) right to land and territory, 8) right to consultation and participation, 9) right to full access to State jurisdiction, and 10) right to development (Martínez Espinoza, 2012, p. 250). Yet again, these rights are not fulfilled. In relation to the right to self-determination, Nancy told me how in her community in San Juan Quiotepec, Ixtlán de Juárez, Oaxaca, the voting to choose a municipal president in 2020 was carried out in a bureaucratic and corrupt manner:

In December 2020 there were elections in my community [...] and there was not even a fair voting process. [The politicians] buy the votes from the people for \$500 [pesos]<sup>13</sup> or for some food [...]. And because people are in need, many do accept, and sadly they get to vote for a person who will be manipulated by politics.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, Rosalinda claimed how indigenous communities do not have access to their land and territory, as accorded in the constitution. This is due to the *Ley Agraria* that states that while it promises to give back the land to the peoples who have been dispossessed, it asks the indigenous peoples to show a proof of land ownership. Therefore, this results in a double standard law that does not prioritize the needs of indigenous individuals.

These examples show that one of the biggest obstacles for indigenous communities, especially women, is the lack of recognition as political subjects. Although the constitution recognizes such rights, it does not actively establish ways to exercise them, resulting in hypocritical and corrupt practices. Instead, indigenous groups, or any other minority group, are submerged into the paradox that laws that should promote indigenous peoples' rights actually restrict them (Martínez Espinoza, 2012). Because of this, it is necessary that the governmental

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<sup>13</sup> 500 Mexican pesos is equivalent to approximately 20 euros.

<sup>14</sup> Original part of transcript: En diciembre del 2020 hubo elecciones en mi comunidad [...] y ni siquiera se sometió a votación. A final de cuentas están o compran votos, [...] se compra en voto por \$500, por una despensa [...]. Y pues las personas por las necesidades, pues, muchos sí aceptan, y tristemente llegan a votar por una persona que lo va a manejar un político.

institutions recognize indigenous people as subjects of political decision and create policies and laws through the vision and needs of the communities.

#### **5.4 Megaprojects: companies and dispossession**

The existence of corrupt policies without priority towards the needs of indigenous communities has occasioned an increase of the entry of national and transnational companies into the territory of indigenous communities. Mexico is one of the countries with most geological and mineral richness (Duyos, 2019). This has resulted in the development of megaprojects, agriculture programs, and neoliberal reforms. The companies arrive with the discourse that the project will benefit the community, but the reality is different, affecting indigenous communities economically, socially, and environmentally (Duyos, 2019). It is important to note that over the years there has been countless cases of megaprojects, including infrastructure, hydroelectric, and mining projects. However, in this section, I will only consider the ones that were discussed throughout the interviews.

Rosalinda lives in the community of San José del Progreso, a small town in the state of Oaxaca. This area is known to have precious metals, such as gold and silver. In 2006, the transnational mining company Cuzcatlán SA de CV, partner of the Canadian firm Fortuna Silver, met with the municipal authorities to request exploration permits in San José del Progreso. It should be added that during this process, the community was never informed concerning the intention of installing a mine to extract gold and silver (Colectivo Oaxaqueño en Defensa de los Territorios, 2013). As Rosalinda expressed, this project was forcefully imposed into the community. Eventually, the extraction began, illegally, in 2011.

This project proposed a 12-year action plan for extraction, as well as infrastructure projects and the use of the water of the community (Colectivo Oaxaqueño en Defensa de los Territorios, 2013). During our interview, Rosalinda narrated some of the most serious consequences of this mining project. Firstly, Rosalinda said that, upon arrival of the company, the community suffered a breakdown of the social ties within the community. The project divided the community into “supporters” and “non-supporters”, leading to the deterioration of organizational structures. During this process, not only the population was divided, but also families and businesses.

Another worrying consequence of the mining project is the environmental impact. The machinery creates dust clouds as well as acid contamination in water. Moreover, the extraction

process causes loud noises throughout the day and night, preventing the community from sleeping peacefully. These factors, in addition to affecting the environment, damage the health of the community as well as the animals (Colectivo Oaxaqueño en Defensa de los Territorios, 2013).

Furthermore, during this project, there have been serious violations of human rights. In light of the harm that the project has brought to the community, movements of opposition against the presence of the company have emerged. Nevertheless, during the first months of 2012, Bernardo Vázquez Sánchez and Bernardo Méndez Vázquez, members of the oppositional groups, were assassinated. On top of that, various members from the community have received death threats and assaults (Colectivo Oaxaqueño en Defensa de los Territorios, 2013). Rosalinda expressed that these circumstances have caused great emotional distress within her community.

The other megaproject discussed during the interviews was with América. She is originally from the indigenous peoples in San Salvador Atenco, a municipality from the State of Mexico. The 22 of October of 2001, the federal government decided to expropriate approximately 5,000 hectares of land from the municipalities of Texcoco, San Salvador Atenco, and Chimalhuacán for the construction of the new International Airport of Mexico City (de la Peña Brandy, 2003). Similar to the case in San José del Progreso, the project was carried out illegally, damaging the social systems of the communities. As América narrated:

In our case, when talking about the construction of the airport, they immediately sell you the idea that the airport is going to be built in a certain area, materially speaking. In a physical area, determined, and geographically located at a specific area. However, in this project as such, it involves many other needs, many other interests, and many other services, and let's say that unfolds an endless industry around it. One of the things that has been seen in megaproject developments of this type, [is that] these spaces end up destroying the original land tenure, in this case [...] the communal, the land of the towns, while the company earns unimaginable profits. [...] The project operators continued to do all kinds of illegalities to take over the land. Most of the time illegally, with corruption, with threats, with imposition, with deceptions. And unfortunately, in a good part of the region's territory, in the case of Texcoco for example, in the case of Atenco, they managed to privatize the land, the territory. As I insist, illegally. [...] What the airport project did was to break apart society and take away our territory. And if we go with a magnifying glass to each municipality and then to each community of these municipalities,

you find that there is a social network that is broken, divided, distrustful, torn, fragmented, and ends with the cohesion that existed before the airport.<sup>15</sup>

The community of Atenco organized protests during 2006 against the construction of the airport in which 2 people were killed, more than 200 people were detained, among which multiple women suffered sexual torture (Duyos, 2019).

What the cases of San José del Progreso and San Salvador Atenco show is how capitalist and neoliberal practices, as being influenced by corruption, racism, and sexism greatly affect the lives of indigenous women and the rest of their community.

### **5.5 Subalternity and silencing**

Sexual, racist, and political violence, together with the transnational projects imposed on indigenous women has led to their structural and systematic exclusion from social processes. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, one way to explain this process of exclusion is through Gayatri Spivak's (1988) theory of subalternity. This term refers to a condition of oppression brought by different forms of hegemonic power. Spivak (1988) puts forward the idea of the subaltern as a matter of who's stories are being heard or who's stories are chosen to be heard. However, I argue that it is not only that indigenous women are chosen not to be heard, but how an extremely violent attempt is made to silence them. To demonstrate this, I have decided to represent it through Rosalinda's story. As previously described, the community where Rosalinda lives has been affected by the mining project. When the project arrived at the community she decided, together with other comrades, to protest against it. Rosalinda and two

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<sup>15</sup> Original part of transcript: En nuestro caso, cuando se habla de la construcción del aeropuerto, inmediatamente te venden la imagen de que el aeropuerto se va a construir en un área determinada, materialmente hablando. En un área física, determinada, y ubicada geográficamente en un punto. Sin embargo, en ese proyecto como tal, implica muchas otras necesidades, muchos otros intereses, y muchos otros servicios, y eso digamos va desdoblado una interminable industria alrededor de un aeropuerto. Una de las cosas que se ha visto en desarrollos de megaproyectos de este tipo, las inmobiliarias, estos espacios que acaban destruyendo la tenencia de la tierra original, en este caso la ejidal, la comunal, la tierra de los pueblos, acaba siendo un punto muy importante para los que operan estos proyectos porque son ganancias inimaginables. [...] Alrededor los operadores del proyecto, o de todo este despojo, siguieron haciendo todo tipo de ilegalidades para apropiarse de la tierra. En su mayoría de las veces de manera ilegal, con corrupción, con amenazas, con imposición, con engaños, y eso no es otra cosa más que corrupción y una mafia super bien orquestada. Y lamentablemente, en buena parte del territorio de la región, en el caso por ejemplo de Texcoco, en el caso de Atenco, lograron privatizar la tierra, el territorio. Como te insisto, de manera ilegal. [...] Lo que hizo el aeropuerto fue una descuartización de territorio. Y si nos vamos con una lupa a cada municipio y luego a cada comunidad de estos municipios, te encuentras que hay un tejido social roto, dividido, desconfiado, despedazado, fragmentado, y termina con la cohesión que existía antes del aeropuerto.

of her comrades suffered a terrible case of persecution and repression organized by the company and supported by the state. This is her story:

When this project arrived, we as a community first went [to the project area] to find out what it was about because the information was unclear [...]. There, we decided to do a march to protest and ask for information, which of all this did not lead us to anything, they did not even receive us [...]. From that moment is when all started to escalate [...]. [For] 3 months [we made] protests: the women went in the morning [...] and the men went at night. The 6<sup>th</sup> of May, during one of those protests, [the police] makes a brutal repression with more than 1,500 elements: they brought motorcycles, dogs, trucks, a helicopter [...] and there were only about 100 women protesting [...]. That for me was really shocking because I told myself: "How is it possible that because we are demanding our right they come that way?" They beat us, detained comrades, and that's where all this persecution started [...]. So that event was honestly [pause] very touching, because it was difficult for us to get our comrades out [of jail] [...].<sup>16</sup>

It should be added that these comrades of whom Rosalinda narrates were arbitrarily arrested and taken to jail. The mining company and the police manipulated the facts, saying, for example, that the women who were protesting were blocking roads and harassing workers, when in reality this was not the case. In other words, they were fabricating crimes, already showing silencing techniques. Rosalinda continued:

By doing these actions, then the State begins to strip the community with the state police. [...] And that marks you a lot because they have a lot of power [...]. And then it was not just the police, but the police with another shock group<sup>17</sup> that the company paid for. And there it began. We continued with our activities, protesting, and strengthening the organization. From 2009 to 2012 they were persecuting us and fabricated crimes for us. It was already like: you ran into them and because you saw them, they fabricated crimes on you [...]. The MP [Public Ministry]

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<sup>16</sup> Original part of transcript: Cuando llega este proyecto, nos juntamos la comunidad primero para saber de qué se trataba porque no estaba clara la información [...]. Ahí decidimos hacer una marcha para protestar y llegar ahí, pedir información, lo cual de todo esto no nos llevó a nada, ni siquiera nos recibieron [...] En ese momento es cuando empezó a tener como auge todo esto [...]. [Durante] 3 meses [hicimos] guardias: las mujeres íbamos en las mañanas [...] y los hombres iban en la noche. En esas guardias llega el 6 de mayo y hacen una represión brutal con más de 1,500 elementos: llevaban motos, llevaban perros, llevaban estos carritos como timotines, el helicóptero... o sea, una persecución... y solo éramos como 100 mujeres que estábamos ahí [...]. Eso para mí fue super impactante porque yo decía: "¿cómo puede ser posible que porque nosotros estamos exigiendo nuestro derecho lleguen de esa manera?" Nos golpearon, detuvieron a compañeros, y ahí fue donde comenzó todo esto de la persecución. Nos costó volver a reestablecernos y sacar a los presos, porque en este desalojo también hubo otra comunidad que nos acompañó, que nos apoyó, que también tuvo gente detenida. Entonces ese evento sinceramente fue así como... muy, muy llegador, porque nos costó sacar a los compañeros.

<sup>17</sup> The term "shock group" (in Spanish *grupo de choque* or *porros*) refers to members of an organization based on organized violence. They commonly infiltrate social movements in order to discredit or delegitimize the initial cause of the movement. It seeks to divert the attention of the movement so that the media focuses on those actions and not on the vindication of the movement (Ordorika, 2005).

were also corrupt, [...] because even though we filed complaints they didn't do anything [...]. We had several ugly and strong clashes [with the police]. But those who began to attack the most were the paramilitaries, some of whom were from agencies, others were from other communities that were paid by the company. They were the destabilizing group that attacked us all the time. Then this escalated and they started to threaten us [...]. First, I remember that on several occasions, when we went to Oaxaca City, they followed us, they were taking us off the road, or starting to flatten the tires [...].

But in 2012, in January, the municipal police was under the power of the PRI<sup>18</sup> and was financed by the mine company. At that moment, they first murdered a man named Bernardo Méndez [...]. The police arrived with weapons, and in that event, they shot him repeatedly, and from the impacts he died here in the hospital. That was the first murder that marked us a lot because we could not believe that we were already talking about weapons. I mean, I couldn't believe that they could attack us like this [...]. After that, they started threatening that if we did not calm down, the same thing that happened to Bernardo could happen to us [...]. In fact, there are several areas in the town where they wrote: “you're going to die”, “*perro*”, “this is your last day”. Direct death threats. And then we, well, we did take some [safety] measures, but it didn't work, because we also didn't have the money or the means to do it. We only had one Tsuru car that belonged to our comrade, the car that we used to commute. So that made us more vulnerable to whatever attack we could have.

The 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2012 was the day of the attack. Bernardo<sup>19</sup>, his brother, and I were returning from Oaxaca City because, at that time I was studying at the university, and the brother was working in a project [...]. And at that time we were also preparing for the annual fair that would take place [...] on March 19 [...]. Suddenly a car stands next to us and started shooting at us [...]. It was around 9:00 at night [...]. They shot us as much as they wanted. What Bernardo did to save us was to go off the road, and that made attackers, I think, to believe that we were already dead. But my first impression was, I mean, I didn't lose consciousness [...]. What worried me was that Bernardo was no longer speaking. Then I started talking to him, but my biggest concern was that [the attackers] would come back to finish us off [...]. And I was afraid. I was afraid that our time was up. But I guess that when they saw all the [bullet] impacts that the car had they thought we were dead.

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to note how the governments of the PRI have affected social movements. These governments developed a continuous and permanent dynamic against drug-related violence that was used as an excuse to repress political dissidence. This military repression had its peak during the administration of Felipe Calderón when he announced the “Mexican drug war”, and led to the lack of protection to civilians during social movements, thus increasing levels of impunity. The current government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador has continued with such militarization (Duyos, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> This is a different Bernardo than the one that was mentioned earlier who was murdered by the police.



Then, I was surprised that I thought I had no bullet impacts. And comrade Bernardo did have several impacts. I spoke to his brother, [...] and he said: "but I don't have any injuries," and I tell him: "well, neither do I." But we had not realized that I had one impact on my shoulder and another on my leg, but the adrenaline is so strong that I think that led me to get out of the car, to move the comrades, and to ask for help [...]. A taxi stopped and I said: "to the doctor." I was very worried because [Bernardo] didn't talk much anymore, I kept talking to him, telling him: "you cannot sleep, you have to talk." I was so anxious that he was going to pass away there. I didn't want him to die. So what came to mind was to take him to a doctor in another town nearby [...]. At that moment I didn't even feel the impacts, the wounds. What I wanted was to save him [...].

When we got there [...] the doctor was not available, so we went to a second hospital. During that time, he lost his life [...]. We did not make it to the second doctor and that was it [...]. That crushed me. From saying that he had been left in my hands, we couldn't save his life [...]. I felt guilt and told myself: "why couldn't we save him?" I mean, it was the intention, but we couldn't do it [...]. All I did was stay there, waiting for the ambulance to arrive. And well, with the agony, because we didn't want that to happen. Aside from the fact that we were companions in the fight, he was my age and we were very good friends. So that was very tough. There we spent about 3 hours until the ambulance arrived, because it also took long. When it arrives [...] [the paramedics] tell me that they are going to examine me. When I take a step, I realize that I had the impact on my leg. My foot was already weak, I no longer had strength. I was wearing boots, my boot was full of blood, but the truth is, at that moment it was more human pain than the pain of the wound [...]. And then I realized that it was a 9-millimeter bullet that had punctured my leg. At that time, I had not seen it. Afterwards they took us to the hospital.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Original part of transcript: Entonces al hacer esas acciones entonces el Estado empieza a saquear con policía estatal a la comunidad [...]. Y eso te marca mucho porque ellos tienen todo un poder [...]. Y después ya no era la policía, sino la policía con otro grupo de choque que pagó la empresa. Y ahí empezó. Nosotros seguimos haciendo actividades, seguimos denunciando, seguimos fortaleciendo la organización, y se vino esta parte en eso del 2009 hasta el 2012 era como persecución. O sea, por todo nos fabricaban delitos, ya era como... o sea, los topabas y porque los veías te fabricaban delitos [...]. Entonces era el MP que también eran unos corruptos [...] porque aunque denunciábamos no les hacían nada [...]. Tuvimos varios enfrentamientos feos y fuertes. Pero quien empezó a agredir más fueron estos paramilitares que unos eran de unas agencias, otros eran de otras comunidades que les pagaba la empresa, que era el grupo desestabilizador que hacía que cuando hacíamos una acción llegaban a agredir. Entonces esto empezó más fuerte y empezaron las amenazas [...]. Primero me acuerdo que en varias ocasiones que salíamos a la Ciudad de Oaxaca nos seguían, y de ahí empezamos a tener esa percepción de que nos sacaban de la carretera, o empezaban a ponchar las llantas [...]. Pero ya en el 2012, en enero, justo había una policía municipal que esos sí cargaban armas, porque quien estaba en ese momento en el poder eran los del PRI y esos tienen varo, y la mina les financiaba muchas cosas. En ese momento del 2012, empezaron primero asesinando a un señor que se llama Bernardo Méndez [...]. Entonces llegó la policía con armas, y en ese evento le dispararon, con miles de impactos, a ese señor, pero por los impactos él muere aquí en el hospital. Ese fue el primer asesinato que la verdad nos marcó mucho porque no podíamos creer que ya estábamos hablando de armas. O sea, no podía creer que nos podían golpear así [...]. Después de eso empezaron más amenazas para que nosotros le bajáramos, así como que podría pasar lo que le pasó a Bernardo [...]. De hecho hay varios espacios en la comunidad donde pusieron escrito: "te vas a morir", "perro", "este es tu último día". Amenazas así, directas, de muerte. Y entonces

Rosalinda spend 3 months in a government hospital where she could not even have some rest. She received bad treatment; the nurses did not treat the wounds properly, causing a part of her bone to remain contaminated, and she developed anemia due to the poor hospital nutrition. This left her with no option than to leave the hospital to recover at home and seek other hospitals. Throughout the years, Rosalinda has had more than 45 surgeries in her leg. Despite all of this, she feels thankful to have survived this experience.

The heartbreaking story of Rosalinda shows how those who decide to oppose to harmful activities, the responses of the government are often characterized by intimidation, repression, imprisonment, disappearances, and even as far as murder (Martínez Espinoza, 2012). While I was listening to Rosalinda's story, I kept asking myself: how is this possible? How is it that the institution that claims to protect the community is the cause of so much pain and contempt?

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nosotros, pues sí, la verdad sí tomamos algunas medidas, pero pues no funcionaron, porque también no teníamos ni la economía ni los medios para hacerlo. Solo teníamos un carro Tsuru que era del compañero, el carro que utilizábamos para movernos. Entonces eso hizo que fuéramos más vulnerables para cualquier atentado que tuviéramos. El 15 del marzo del 2012 fue el día del atentado. Justo nosotros regresábamos de la Ciudad de Oaxaca porque, en ese momento yo no estaba trabajando, estaba estudiando, estaba en la universidad, y el compañero estaba trabajando en un programa del maíz [...]. Y en ese momento también estábamos con los preparativos de la feria anual que se hace en marzo, el 19 de marzo. Entonces [...] se nos empareja un carro y nos empiezan a disparar [...]. Eran como las 9:00 de la noche más o menos [...]. En esa ocasión nos dispararon hasta donde quisieron. Lo que hizo el compañero como para querernos salvar pues se salió de la carretera para querernos proteger, y eso hizo que las personas, creo que creyeron que ya estábamos muertos. Pero mi primera impresión era, o sea, yo no perdí el conocimiento [...]. Lo que a mí me preocupaba era que los compañeros ya no hablaban. Entonces yo les empecé a hablar, pero sí mi preocupación así como lo máximo era que llegaran a rematarnos, como decimos “a darnos el tiro de gracia”, y sí tenía miedo. Tenía miedo que en eso termináramos. Pero creo que ellos al ver todos los impactos que tuvo el carro pensaron que ahí habíamos quedado. Entonces yo me doy la sorpresa que según yo no tenía ningún impacto de bala. Y el compañero Bernardo sí tenía varios impactos, entonces le hablé al hermano [...] y él dice: “pero yo no tengo ninguna herida”, y le digo: “pues yo tampoco”. Pero no nos habíamos percatado de que yo tenía el impacto acá en el hombro y tenía el de la pierna, pero la adrenalina es tan fuerte que creo que eso me llevó a bajarme del carro, a mover a los compañeros, a él que se saliera a pedir ayuda [...]. Se paró un taxi que nos hizo el paro y yo lo que dije: “al médico”. Yo estaba muy preocupada porque él ya no hablaba mucho, yo le seguía hablando, porque decía: “no tienes que dormirte, tienes que hablar”. Esa ansiedad de que no fuera a quedar ahí, yo no quería que él muriera, entonces lo que se me vino a la mente fue llevarlo a un médico que estaba a otro pueblo más adelante [...]. En ese momento ni siquiera sentía los impactos, las heridas. Entonces lo que yo quería era que se salvara [...]. Cuando llegamos ahí [...] [el] médico no estaba y nos quisimos jalar al segundo. En ese lapso pues él pierde la vida [...]. No llegamos al segundo médico y pues ya [...]. Y eso pues a mí me apachurró. De decir que había quedado en mis manos, no le pudimos salvar la vida [...]. Era la culpa, y decir “¿por qué no pudimos salvarlo?” O sea, era la intención pero no lo logramos hacer [...]. Yo lo único que hice fue quedarme ahí, esperando que llegara la ambulancia. Y pues, con el dolor, porque pues no queríamos que pasara eso. Aparte de que fuimos compañeros de lucha, pues también él era un chavo como de la edad, y pues nos llevábamos súper bien. Y eso, sea como sea, pues nos pegó. Ayer estuvimos unas 3 horas hasta que llegó la ambulancia, porque también tardó. Cuando llegan, [...] me dicen que me van a revisar a mí. Cuando doy el paso es que me doy cuenta que tenía el impacto en la pierna. Entonces cuando me doy cuenta es al dar el paso mi pie ya estaba débil porque ya no tenía fuerza. Llevaba botas, mi bota estaba llena de sangre, pero pues la verdad, en ese momento era más el dolor humano que el dolor de la herida [...]. Y ya cuando me di cuenta que era una bala de 9 milímetros que me había vaciado mi pierna. En ese momento no lo había yo visto. Y ya después nos llevaron al hospital.

This angers me and saddens me. But very unfortunately, cases such as these are not uncommon, taking as an example the case of Acteal mentioned at the beginning of this thesis.

Scholars such as Sofía Duyos (2019) claim that these forms of repression are carried out as a form of punishment due to political and economic reasons and whose perpetrators are the State agents. The state, in this way, acts as an institution which acts under its own convenience, reaching extreme forms of violence to fulfil their own capitalist and neoliberal needs. The indigenous individuals who work towards defending their territory, the right to a dignified life, and the right for self-determination have been the group most punished with death. The states where more deaths have been registered are those of Oaxaca, Guerrero, followed by Chiapas, Veracruz, and Chihuahua (Duyos, 2019). Hence, the subaltern is not heard because extreme measures are used to silence her: threats, torture, unjustified imprisonment, disappearances, and even death.

### **5.6 A war against indigenous women**

The various forms of violence described so far represents, as Mexican researcher María Belausteguigoitia (2001) has proposed, different degrees of “dilution” of the voice of the other, the subaltern. Violence, be it racist, sexist, political, economic, and/or epistemic brings silence and exclusion as a consequence. If repression and impunity are added to this context of generalized violence, it means that Mexico is facing a serious human right crisis, where the most affected are indigenous women (Duyos, 2019).

In Mexico, this phenomenon does not only represent a crisis of freedom of expression, but there is a directly active attempt at using criminalization to silence not just any voice, but the voices who challenge and criticize the hegemonic forms of power. This is a reality that, as Segato (2016) claims, represents a war against women that no one talks about. Such dynamic, places women in the need to resist hegemonic discourses of power. Given the violence and the attempts made to silence indigenous women, it is utterly important to emphasize their voices and resistance, in other words, create a historical archive that contributes to the memory of their insights and resistances. Therefore, in the next chapter I will delve into the ways in which the resistances, activisms, and insights of indigenous women influence the fight against structural and symbolic violence.

## Chapter 6. *Resistencia*: Indigenous women fights

So far, I have shown how symbolic and structural violence against indigenous women in Mexico is maintained and perpetrated. Indigenous women have been placed in a position of subordination and exclusion resulting from racist, sexist, political, and economic violence (Ruiz, 2002; Hernández Aguilar, 2010). Investigating and analyzing the position of indigenous women throughout history in Mexico is helpful and necessary to better understand the roots and importance of their struggles and resistances. Then, recalling the research question of this thesis: How can the resistances, activisms, and insights of Mexican indigenous women influence the fight against structural and systemic violence? In this chapter I will present the results to such research question. To do so, I will first explain what do the indigenous women interviewed in this research mean by the concept of resistance and why do they think it is important. Subsequently, I will show that there are multiple ways this resistance is manifested. In other words, resistance is multifaceted: it is constantly transforming through time and space. It should be added that the results presented in this chapter represent only some of the ways resistance is manifested, as well as there is no right or wrong way to exercise it.

In answering this research question, I aim to contribute to the creation of a *memoria histórica*, or ‘historical memory’, of the resistances, insights, and movements of indigenous women that have often been (purposely) forgotten in the past (de Coll, 1991). Additionally, I aim to reiterate that indigenous women's resistance processes have been deeply active, and not passive, as has been previously proposed (e.g. Garduño, 2004). It is important to recognize that, as Weheliye (2014) proposes, even in places of oppression there are still moments of liberation. Thus, there is not only power in oppression, but there is power in resistance (Foucault, 1978).

### 6.1 La Resistencia

What do we think when we hear the word “resistance”? Despite the various ways of defining resistance, in this thesis I will define it based on three factors that were mentioned during the interviews: *rechazar*, *luchar*, and *seguir* (i.e. reject, fight, and endure). The first factor relates to the idea of, as Aline explained, rejecting those actions and discourses that oppress. This idea can be further explained by Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) concept of *la facultad*. Anzaldúa postulates that those individuals who live under systems of oppression develop a level of

awareness that will allow them to see, perceive, and understand their condition, and in turn unravel such systems of oppression. *La facultad*, then, is the capacity that ruptures processes that lead to violence and allows individuals to develop new forms of consciousness. This awareness of one's condition therefore allows one to reject, or challenge, those hegemonies that oppress them, while at the same time, develop a sense of agency.

This rejection can then lead to action, *luchar*, be it individual or collective that seeks to challenge and transform the powerful status quo in society. As Eitelia, Érica, and América expressed, this refers to fighting and defending what has been taken away from indigenous women throughout the years, such as their territory, integrity, decisions over their bodies, beliefs, lifestyle, and dignity. This fighting manifests individually and collectively through actions that serve to the self-construction of an active political subject.

The last factor that is helpful in understanding the concept of resistance is *seguir*, or endure, together with this rejection and fighting. As Nancy said:

Resistance is being present. To endure. [...]. The ability I have to continue despite threats and attacks, despite the fact that I am a vulnerable person, despite the fact that demanding a right I know could harm me, my family, my social environment, my parents, my brothers.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Rosalinda expressed: "For me, resistance is to maintain the ideal, it is to strengthen our organization, it is to continue working, to continue informing, and [...] to make this process visible."<sup>22</sup> Beatriz expressed as well: "[Resistance entails] staying on my own feet, enduring on the path that we want to follow, the path we want to do, how we want to live, value what we have, to be able to look at it again and value it."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, resistance involves different processes and different stages that seek to end the normalization of violence and create a better future together.

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<sup>21</sup> Original part of transcript: Resistencia es estar. Seguir. [...]. La capacidad que tengo para seguir en ese ámbito, a pesar de las amenazas y las agresiones, a pesar de que soy una persona vulnerable, a pesar de que el estar exigiendo un derecho sé que me puede perjudicar, posiblemente a mi persona, a mi familia, a mi entorno social, a mis padres, a mis hermanos.

<sup>22</sup> Original part of transcript: Para mí la resistencia es mantener el ideal, es fortalecer la organización, es seguir trabajando, seguir informando, y [...] lograr visibilizar este proceso que tenemos.

<sup>23</sup> Original part of transcript: Seguir manteniéndome en mis propios pies, seguir manteniéndonos en el camino que nosotros o nosotras queremos seguir, el camino que queremos hacer, cómo queremos vivir, qué tenemos, poder volver a mirarlo, valorarlo.

## 6.2 Resistance has always been present

Before explaining how resistance is manifested, it is important to reiterate that the resistance of indigenous women has always been present. The indigenous populations, from the first moment of conquest, fought and resisted to defend their territory and their identity, and women were always present in this process. From the multiple battles (e.g. Izcuintepeque, Cuzcatlán, Calacoaya, *La Noche Triste*, among others), where indigenous individuals fought against the Spaniards, to indigenous women's abortions to not give birth to "bastard children" (de Coll, 1991; Garduño, 2004). Albeit the record of the resistance of indigenous women has been scarce throughout history, it is important to recognize the actions, thoughts, and transformation to reverse the effects of oblivion.

## 6.3 The reappropriation of identity and autonomy

Violence and oppression throughout the years has resulted in a shift of indigenous identities. The process of mestizaje created a cultural model of hierarchization between the 'indigenous' and 'non-indigenous' (Hernández Aguilar, 2010). The notion of indigenous became a symbol of humiliation and degradation, which not only excluded them socially and politically, but also attributed prejudices based on cultural practices, behavior, and physical aspects (Smeke de Zonana, 2000; Galeano, 2010). This violence has eventually shaped identity formation in indigenous communities, turning into something negative and leading indigenous individuals to interiorize it.

As a consequence, indigenous women resist to the negative connotations attached to the word 'indigenous' and re-transform it into something positive. That is, the engagement in the re-appropriation and re-definition of identity. During our interview, Beatriz—a Mixteca woman from Oaxaca—shared with me how through her work as a defender of women's rights, she has engaged in a journey to redefine her indigenous identity. She said:

[I love] having the opportunity to recover my identity, who I am. Because for a long time I, in fact, left the community to study a career, to be different from what we were in the community [...]. Working on these issues of reconnecting with who I am, [...] with what my mother does in the fields, and value what she produces: corn, beans, *totopos*<sup>24</sup>, raises rabbits, has chickens. Everything that comes from the field, I can now value it a lot. And there was a time when I

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<sup>24</sup> *Totopos* are tortilla cut into pieces that has been toasted, fried, or baked.

rejected it. So, that has been helpful. It is very nice because it has helped me to reconnect with my family, with my community, with myself, to see that I don't have to do other things to be another, to stop being who I am. On the contrary, I look back at what I am and I don't have to change anything, because what I am is not bad [...]. That part has been beautiful in this journey. [I have] greater emotional stability as well [...]. It has led me to that reconnection and to settle down. Because I think I was losing it [...]. I had the idea that I needed to have a career, get married, have children, buy a two-story cement house, wear expensive shoes, a jacket, and thought that was going to be my life. I thought that was the good life, the only way of life one must have. This has led me to a lot of analysis and to have the great opportunity to be able to build my own life as I wanted, in a freer way.<sup>25</sup>

Beatriz beautifully described how she has managed to admire her roots and feel happy with the practices performed in her community. Similarly, Astrid is currently studying fashion design and shared how her vision on the word 'indigenous' has changed through time. She explained:

Before, I thought: "[an indigenous person] is *morena*<sup>26</sup>, different from the others". And yes, but being indigenous is not only that, or the clothing, and so on. For me it represents the culture that unfortunately has been lost here because we were mixed. But for me being indigenous represents culture. Because for me [...] seeing all those textiles that are valuable to me, it is like: "wow!". [...] I appreciate all of that and all the knowledge that indigenous people have, as it is not easy to do those things [...] that they learn from a young age. The same with gastronomy and with the other ways of seeing life spiritually. For me it's like [pause] knowing a little more about our origins. For me, when they call me indigenous, they are talking about culture and also a little more about my origin.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Original part of transcript: Esa parte de tener la oportunidad de recuperar mi identidad. De quién soy, porque por mucho tiempo yo, de hecho, salí de la comunidad para estudiar una carrera, para ser otra, para ser diferente a lo que éramos en la comunidad [...]. Trabajar estos temas de ir reconectando con lo que soy, [...] de lo que mi mamá sabe hacer, de lo que trabaja en el campo, de lo que produce, darle el valor que tiene lo que ella produce: maíz, frijol, hace totopos, cría conejos, tiene gallinas. Todo lo que se da en el campo, yo ahora lo puedo valorar bastante. Y hubo un tiempo en el que yo lo rechazaba. Entonces, eso me ha ido ayudando. Es muy bonito porque me ha ayudado a ir reconectando con mi familia, con mi comunidad, conmigo misma, de ver que no tengo que hacer un mundo de cosas para ser otra. Para dejar de ser quien soy, sino al contrario, esto va en retorno a volver a mirar lo que soy y que no tengo que cambiar nada, porque lo que soy no es feo. Así como soy. Esa parte ha sido bellísima en este caminar, en este recorrido. Una mayor estabilidad emocional también. [...]. Entonces me ha llevado a eso, a una reconexión o a volver a echar raíces. Porque creo que yo iba perdiendo el piso. [...]. Me llegué a formar con una idea de vida como tienes que hacer una carrera, casarte, tener hijos, comprarte una casa de esas de dos pisos que sea de cemento, usar zapatillas, saco, y esa va a ser tu vida. Esa es la vida buena, la única forma de vida que hay que tener. Y entonces me ha llevado a un montón de análisis y esta gran oportunidad de poder construirla, mi propia vida como quisiera, de una manera más libre.

<sup>26</sup> Refers to a person with dark or black skin, complexion, or hair.

<sup>27</sup> Original part of transcript Antes yo pensaba: "no, pues es una persona que es morena, distinta a los demás", y sí, pero lo indígena no solo acaba en esto, o que la vestimenta y así. Para mí todo eso es cultura que desgraciadamente se ha perdido aquí porque fuimos mezclados. Pero para mí el ser indígena se llama cultura. Porque para mí [...] ver todos esos trajes que *para mí* son valiosos, que es como que "wow". [...]. Es apreciar

The words of Beatriz and Astrid show how they have engaged in a process of appreciation towards their cultural practices. Aspects such as clothing, language, agriculture, and even skin color was historically tried to be eliminated through assimilation practices. Nevertheless, Beatriz and Astrid have appropriated and preserved those aspects constitutive of their identity and turned them into something positive.

Another important process in identity formation implies the self-recognition with a particular group or community. For instance, Érica shared how she developed a sense of belonging when she recently discovered that she was *afromestiza*.<sup>28</sup> This discovery provided her with positive feelings in her identity construction. When I asked her how she felt when she found out she is *afromestiza*, this was her response:

[I felt] super happy! You can't even imagine. I felt... I don't know how to explain to you that I felt like... like something here [she touches her chest] that moves [...]. There are people around who are from indigenous peoples, but I do not feel belongingness to an indigenous community. I didn't feel it, there wasn't something that told me: "yes, you are" [...]. But when I discover that I am *afromestiza*, then I say: "oh, yes I am! Yes I am, yes I am!" [...]. I was always investigating why my mother did not have a history of indigenous peoples [...]. But my mom, my mom's mom was brunette, mulatto, with wide hips, big nose, curly hair, big hands [...]. They have the physiognomies and traditions as well. So of course, I said: "I'm from here." And yes, it is possible, because on the coast of Oaxaca there are *afromestizos* [...]. And after that I declared myself as *afromestiza*, and I feel very happy about that. The truth is, I feel very identified, I feel comfortable, I like being this way. [...]. I feel identified and part of a group.<sup>29</sup>

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todo eso y ese conocimiento que ellos tienen, hablando de los indígenas, que ellos tienen y *no es fácil* hacer esas cosas [...] que luego ellas aprenden desde pequeñas. Igual luego de la gastronomía, con otras formas de ver la vida espiritualmente. Para mí es como que [pausa] un poco más nuestros orígenes. Para mí cuando me dicen indígena me están hablando de cultura y también un poco más de mi origen.

<sup>28</sup> Refers to the individuals of African descent brought as slaves to Mexico during the colonial era who were mixed with indigenous and/or European blood. The *afromestizo* population has had their own particular struggles, which go beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>29</sup> Original part of transcript: ¡Uy, súper feliz! No sabes, me sentí... no sé cómo explicarte que me sentí como... como algo aquí que se mueve [...]. Hay gente que está alrededor que son de pueblos originarios, pero yo no me siento de un pueblo originario. Yo no lo sentía, no había algo aquí que me decía: "sí eres" [...]. Pero cuando descubro que soy *afromestiza* entonces digo: "ah, ¡sí soy! Sí soy, sí lo soy" [...]. Yo estaba siempre investigando porqué mi mamá no tenía antecedentes de pueblos originarios [...]. Pero mi mamá, la mamá de mi mamá era morena, así súper morenita, mulata, con caderas anchas, nariz grande, cabello chino, manos grandes, así. [...]. Pero todas sus primas, que ella les decía hermanos, son mulatos. Tienen todas las fisonomías y las tradiciones también. Entonces claro, yo dije: "de aquí soy". Y sí es posible, porque en la costa de Oaxaca hay pueblos *afromestizos*, entonces claro, yo dije: "sí, sí lo soy". Y ya después de eso ya me declaré como *afromestiza*, y me siento muy contenta de eso, la verdad, me siento bastante identificada, me siento cómoda, me gusta el hecho de ser así. [...]. Con ese sentimiento, con ese sentir de sentirme identificada y parte de un grupo.



In this way, it is not only the reaffirmation of identity, but also the realization of belongingness that constitute important processes of identity formation. The value and positivity attributed to identity resists the cultural models that have historically been created to eliminate and exclude the 'unwanted'. It is resistance as it engages in the preservation of knowledge, culture, and ways of understanding the world (Smeke de Zonana, 2000). Likewise, a redefinition of identity is a way to rebuild subjectivity and a sense of agency (Hernández Aguilar, 2010).

Resistance as the reappropriation of indigenous identity is directly linked to the construction of autonomy as a social and political action (Galeano, 2010; Hernández Aguilar, 2010). Colonial discourses led to the construction of indigenous populations, particularly women, as passive subjects, incompetent for political understanding and dependence on the state for the 'development' of their community. As Rosalinda said: “[the government] has made visible that we do not want development, that we are communities who do not understand. But it is not true.”<sup>30</sup> In this way, the recognition as an indigenous group that values and appropriates its practices leads to the construction of indigenous women as political subjects. For example, as Beatriz explained:

There is knowledge, there are many elements for women to make our *own* decisions. And I think that is what makes the difference, that all that knowledge, the self-reflection, and the re-evaluation of who we are, allows us to make our own decisions. I believe that this improves our life. And when people can make our own decisions freely, that joy, that clarity, that security is what women can also transmit to their sons and daughters in the community as well, because a woman capable of making her own decisions can also contribute much more to her community and the environment. A happy and strong woman [...] is more motivated.<sup>31</sup>

This shows how important the reappropriation of identity is. Resisting to discourses and ideas of what is thought to be indigenous opens the way for the construction of indigenous women as subjects—rather than object—of social and political change. It implies a process of liberation where indigenous women make their own decisions and take control of their experiences based on agency and autonomy. Therefore, taking control of the re-evaluation, the

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<sup>30</sup> Original part of transcript: Ellos han visibilizado que nosotros no queremos el desarrollo, que somos comunidades que no entendemos. Pero no es cierto.

<sup>31</sup> Original part of transcript: Hay conocimiento, hay muchos elementos para que podamos las mujeres tomar nuestras *propias* decisiones. Y creo que es eso que marca la diferencia, que todo ese conocimiento, esa reflexión que podamos hacer y esa *revaloración* de lo que somos, nos permite ese punto. Tomar *nuestras* propias decisiones. En eso yo creo que mejora nuestra vida. Y cuando las personas podemos tomar nuestras propias decisiones de manera libre, esa alegría, esa claridad, esa seguridad es la que las mujeres también pueden transmitir a sus hijos e hijas a la comunidad también, porque una mujer capaz de tomar sus propias decisiones también puede aportar mucho más a su comunidad y al medio ambiente. Una mujer contenta y fuerte [...] [está] mucho más motivada.

re-appropriation, and the re-signification of what constitutes to be an indigenous woman implies a reversal of power. Indigenous women, as self-defined subjects, regain the power over their own bodies and existence.

#### 6.4 “Defend what is yours”

The process of the reappropriation of identity encourages action, and thus, it is intrinsically linked to the defense of rights. Through agency and subjectivity, indigenous women have demanded the fulfillment of their rights that have been seriously violated throughout history. In this way, as Nancy puts it, indigenous women have raised their voices and made themselves heard. Indigenous communities have resisted the violation of their rights and actively defended what belongs to them: their culture, languages, knowledge, territory, health access, and much more (Dorrnsoro, 2013). It is important to note that women have played crucial roles in the defense of rights, which must be named and recognized.

Nancy is a Chinanteca woman and works in the defense of human rights in the community of San Juan Quiotepec, Oaxaca, and she reiterates the importance of making her voice heard. She encourages other members of her community to resist conformity and express their opinion. Nancy has been active in being a voice for defending the rights of the people of her community. For example, during elections, she has voiced her opinion directly to the municipal president of her community expressing her discontent with the fulfillment of the rights of indigenous communities. Even though her and her family received threats after her demands, she called the president again and told him to give a personal message to the person who was threatening her: “This is what happened, and I know that right now that person, or whoever you sent to do this, is there with you. Just tell him that I'm not going to keep quiet. I am not like other people. I'm not scared [...]. And I hold him accountable for whatever happens.”<sup>32</sup> In this way, Nancy has demonstrated that defending that her rights are respected is a crucial form of resistance.

Something that has been widely defended within indigenous communities is the right for self-determination, that is, the ability to determine the limits of their territory and act based on their own decisions (Galeano, 2010). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Rosalinda and

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<sup>32</sup> Original part of transcript: Pasó esto y fueron tales personas, y sé que ahorita esa persona, o quién mandó a hacer eso, está ahí con usted. Que nada más dígame que yo no me voy a quedar callada. Yo no soy como las demás personas. Yo no tengo miedo [...]. Y lo responsabilizo por cualquier cosa que pase.

América have engaged in a fight against megaprojects and neoliberal reforms. It is important to talk about these rights because, as Rosalinda explained, men and women have lost their lives to it.

Rosalinda is a Zapoteca woman and further expressed how she has worked with an organization that since 2008 they have developed their own autonomous government within her community. As she said:

We say that San José del Progreso is a municipality with two authorities: the administrative one that depends on the government and that supports the mine, and the autonomous, within the community, which coordinates all our activities: the parties, [...] everything. And we believe that this way we continue resisting.<sup>33</sup>

These resistances must be recognized and respected both by the State and society. The rights of indigenous communities mentioned in the law must be imparted as such. These insights increase the awareness to the fact that the rights of indigenous communities, as established in the law, are not being exercised.

Furthermore, work has been done to defend the rights of indigenous women such as the right to take part in political decisions and a life free of violence. Evitelia—a Mixe woman—, for instance, has talked to the municipal president of her community Emiliano Zapata, San Juan Cotzocón, in Oaxaca, to express her discontent with the prohibition given to indigenous women from participating in assemblies and political decisions, as well as the maltreatment within institutions. Evitelia voiced that indigenous women have the right to participate in social and political processes, and hence resists the preconceived idea that women only belong to the household work. In this way, Evitelia resists sexist and capitalist violence.

## 6.5 Understanding and questioning

An important process in the defense of rights implies not only knowing them, but also understanding them. As Astrid expressed, this understanding is crucial in the claiming of indigenous rights, especially when these are being violated by different sectors in society. Astrid emphasized that one of society's task is to teach children and the younger generations

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<sup>33</sup> Original part of transcript: Nosotros decimos que San José del Progreso es un municipio con dos autoridades: la administrativa que depende del gobierno y que apoya la mina, y la autónoma, comunitaria, que es la coordinadora que ha, hasta el momento, sigue trabajando con todo: las fiestas, los teyos, todo. Y creemos que eso ya es seguir resistiendo.

about the importance of defending their rights. Similarly, Eveltia has worked with groups of women giving talks about women's rights and how to recognize situations where they are experiencing a rights violation, such as partner abandonment and domestic violence. These are valuable actions of resistance as it resists a system of structural violence that does not facilitate access to information and justice.

Interestingly, Érica shared with me a relevant aspect that needs to be taken into account when talking about women rights. Through her work as a teacher Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural, she has engaged in reflecting and questioning the established rights within the university. As an example, she narrated an incident at the university in which her and other teachers received a course about human rights with a gender perspective given by a lawyer specialized in gender violence. As Érica narrated:

[The lawyer] was talking about situations of violence and about the rights that women and men have. I don't know if she realized, but suddenly she started justifying men's actions based on rights. This annoyed me, especially because there was a moment when she exposed that [...] a [male] student had come to the university wearing a skirt. And there had been a regulation in Mexico that school uniforms are no longer mandatory, and that girls could wear pants and boys could wear whatever they wanted. [...]. So a teacher [...] said: "Well, the kid has the right to be dressed as he wants." But after that, another teacher said: "Recently a girl came to the university dressed in very short shorts and a top. All my students were looking at her and were not paying attention to my class, so I asked her to leave [...]." And then the teacher was very offended because they had called her attention and not the girl's. But instead of focusing on reflecting on the need to break with stereotypes, break with violence, and on our culture that, especially for men, continues to focus on women's bodies and not on their capacities [...]. This made me angry. And I told them that instead of focusing in the inconsistencies within the rights for women, it is showing how we use the laws in favor for some and against others.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Original part of transcript: [La maestra abogada] Estaba hablando de esto de las violencias, de las situaciones que viven, de los derechos que tenemos las mujeres y los hombres, pero ella no sé si se dio cuenta o no, pero de repente estaba siempre justificando las acciones de los hombres a partir de los derechos. Y a mí me dio un poco de molestia, sobre todo porque hubo un momento en el que se expuso que [...] un chavo había entrado a la universidad con falda. A partir de las publicaciones en México que ya no se iban a prohibir los uniformes a las niñas y que las niñas podían usar pantalón y los niños también lo que quisieran. [...]. Entonces la maestra trató de ser un poco amesurada, y dijo: "bueno, el chavo tiene derecho a estar vestido como quiera". Pero después de eso, una maestra dijo: "hace poco llegó una chava vestida con un short *muy* corto a la universidad, y un top. Entonces se sentó y todos la estaban mirando y no ponían atención a mi clase, entonces yo le pedí que se saliera. Ella se fue a la dirección y a la que llamaron la atención fue a mí y no a la chava". Y entonces la maestra estaba muy indignada porque le habían llamado la atención a ella y no a la chava. Pero en vez de centrarse en reflexionar sobre esta necesidad de romper con los estereotipos, romper con las violencias, y de que nuestra cultura, sobre todo para los hombres, sigue siendo de poner la mirada en el cuerpo de las mujeres y no en sus capacidades. [...]. Entonces a mí me generó enojo, y lo dije ahí, porque entonces en vez de estar en nosotros hablando sobre los huecos que hay

Here, Érica expresses the importance of questioning how rights are being used and implemented to avoid the perpetration of sexist stereotypes about women. She further stated her concern that people in power, especially those who claim to have awareness of gender issues—as expected in this particular case—are not leaving a place of comfort to question themselves how violence is being normalized through these practices. Hence, government institutions do not only lack a vision of gender equity, but they also lack awareness of the situations that indigenous communities go through. As Érica said, rights do not always protect, and it is for this reason that indigenous women, together with their community, are working towards a change of reflection, of conscience, and of conscientization. Therefore, this is a form of resistance because it seeks to transform mentalities about established rights that claim to benefit communities. Through this questioning, sources of violence are identified, and thus, incite change.

## 6.6 Collective resistance

Social movements emerge as oppositional resistance to hegemonic powers in society. These movements emphasize the collective action in the search for liberation and transformation (Hernández Aguilar, 2010). Indigenous women have participated in the various forms that social movements unfold: marches, organizations, social groups, walks, and so on (Núñez Miranda, 2007). As a first instance, the fact that indigenous women are going out to the streets to demand their needs and gathering to reflect upon social issues, resists the patriarchal discourses defining the public sphere (men) and the private sphere (women). In Érica's words:

Deciding to be in a social group is a way of resisting. To resist the idea that women should be alone at home, to resist the idea that women should be isolated and not generate collaborative groups. The fact of forming collaborative networks is also a form of resistance. [...]. You resist against that situation that limited you, the fact of not going out and doing what you wanted, or what you expected, or what you needed, and in this way you can do it.<sup>35</sup>

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en los artículos de los derechos en México y los derechos hacia la mujer y hacia todos en general, estamos hablando de cómo usar las leyes a favor de unos y en contra de otros.

<sup>35</sup> Original part of transcript: El hecho de decidir estar en un grupo es una forma de resistir también, a resistir a esa idea de que las mujeres debemos estar solas en casa, a resistir a la idea de que las mujeres se ven aisladas para no generar grupos que en un futuro las defiendan, o grupos de colaboración. El hecho de formar redes de colaboración también es una forma de resistir. [...]. Resistes ante esa situación que te limitaba, el hecho de no salir y hacer lo que tú querías, o que tú esperabas, o que necesitabas, y entonces lo puedes hacer.

The collective work that indigenous women do are key in the struggle and history of the country. Through this work, indigenous women are being able to consider themselves—and be considered socially—as political subjects with the capacity for social transformation. According to Alain Touraine’s (as cited in Hernández Aguilar, 2010) “theory of new social movements”, social movements provide individuals with the faculty to transform society. Indeed, indigenous women have engaged in various forms of collective resistance that influence the fight against structural and systemic violence.

One of the ways in which indigenous women engage in collective resistance is through the defense of their territory. For instance, Rosalinda and América have been involved in organizational processes with their community to defend their land against harmful neoliberal reforms. Rosalinda entered her community’s organization since 2008 and was the first woman to participate in the organization. Later, she helped with the creation of an organization of only women who could play a leading role in the defense of territory. Through these organizations, Rosalinda and her comrades organize marches and protests. Similarly, América has been involved in organizational processes in which she and other members of her community assess the harms done to their land and develop plans of action against them. Thus, through these organizational processes, Rosalinda and América have resisted against neoliberal influences.

The feminist movement has played an important role in the processes of collective resistance. Indigenous feminism, or *feminismo comunitario*, has questioned the patriarchal, racist, and sexist practices of society that keep women in a state of subordination (Curiel, 2007, as cited in Dorronsoro, 2013). As such, indigenous feminism seeks to endorse the struggle from the collective, of those who have shared a common history. Astrid and Rosalinda have participated in feminist marches, such as the ones organized for International Women’s Day on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March each year. Particularly, Astrid shared how she got inspired from seeing feminist marches through social media that in the year 2020, she decided to march by herself through the streets of her town Oteapan in Veracruz. Astrid emphasized how she aimed to inspire young girls to raise their voices by seeing her marching on the street. Likewise, Rosalinda explained how the marches are a way of asking for justice for those girls and women who have been victims of femicide. An action to give voice to those who are no longer alive.

An important aspect of the feminist movements of indigenous women is the creation of groups, or collectives, of women. These groups arise as initiatives to involve women in the fight for women’s rights, as well as to make visible the work that women do, and thus move

away from elitist or exclusionary practices (Dopazo Gallego, 2015). The women I interviewed commented that through these groups, their main aim is to transform mentalities. For instance, Evitelia and her comrades organize talks with young and older women where they reiterate that women are subjects deserving of rights and that women must live a life free of violence. Likewise, Beatriz has been involved for 16 years on the creation of networks and groups of women from different communities, and Érica collaborates with a community group called *Mujeres Defensoras Sanadoras*.

Something important to add is that feminismo comunitario is based on the construction of a theoretical-practical process. It does not seek to exclude or hierarchize knowledge, experiences, and struggles (Dopazo Gallego, 2015). This aspect is exemplified by what Aline shared during our interview. She said:

A school for me is the books, the authors, the feminist theorists, but on the other hand, the other school is the women of the communities, my friends. [...]. On one hand yes, the readings, the academic knowledge, but on the other hand it is who you hang out with, who you associate with, who you know, who you work with, and that, for me, the women with whom I speak daily they my teachers of life. This makes sense to me in a personal way, in a very deep way, and it seems to me that it is one of the only ways to transform the world. [...]. And noticing these different realities make you want to change things, for yourself and for others. So I think that's it. I believe that one thing that we inherit from feminists [scholars], but it is not just about the theory that you know, or whether you understand it, rather, it passes through your body, it passes through your experiences, what hurts you, and so on.<sup>36</sup>

The powerful comment of Aline shows how it is imperative not to discredit different forms of exercising struggles and resistances, that is, not only through theoretical practices. Instead, learning from each other, hearing each other's life experiences strengthens ties and diversifies the ways of expressing feminism. In line with feminismo comunitario, the focus lies on, as Julieta Paredes (2017) suggests, the *fight of any woman*. This way, the movements of

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<sup>36</sup> Original part of transcript: Una escuela para mí son los libros, las autoras, las teóricas feministas, pero por otro lado, la otra escuela son las mujeres de las comunidades, mis amigas. [...]. Por un lado sí, las lecturas, por un lado esa formación ilustrada, pero por otro lado es eso, con quién te juntas, con quien te ligas, a quiénes conoces, con quiénes trabajas, y eso, para mí las mujeres con las que hablo cotidianamente son maestras de vida. Entonces, finalmente a mí me hace sentido de manera personal, de manera muy profunda, y me parece que es una de las únicas maneras de transformar el mundo. [...]. Y este notar de sentido, estas realidades, sí te hacen querer trabajar cosas que quieres que sean diferentes, para ti y para las otras. Entonces yo creo que es eso. Yo creo que una cosa que heredamos las feministas, o que tenemos las feministas, es que no es un tema solo teórico de lo que conoces, de lo que más si esto lo entiendes, sino que pasa por tu cuerpo, pasa por tus experiencias, pasa por lo que te duele, y por lo que quisieras.

indigenous women move away from the historical presence of the feminist academic elite. Indigenous women engage in revolutionizing the movement theoretically, conceptually, socially, and politically. Thus, it aspires to the creation of a feminist movement constructed from *own* thought and *own* experience (Paredes, 2017).

Last but not least, the collective movements of indigenous women also focus on the diffusion of information and experiences. For instance, Rosalinda and her comrades have a community radio in which they share information about the mining project and its effects, advising other communities how to stay together through these processes. She feels content to share her experience with others as a way to inform other women to be aware of this situation. As Rosalinda expressed: “one of my first goals is to spread the word about what happened [to us] so that it doesn’t happen to other communities”.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Aline has written a book where, from a feminist perspective, displays the testimonies of the women who participated in the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), a group that occupied the capital city of Oaxaca in 2006 protesting against the state’s governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz (Bellinghausen & Velez, 2006). For instance, the anger at the situation led the women to take the government’s radio and television agency to reveal truths about racism, classism, discrimination, and corruption, and redeem a space for women to be heard (Bellinghausen & Velez, 2006).

Overall, collective resistances address an important process of demanding that indigenous women’s voices are heard and thus develop themselves as political subjects of social change. Through organizational projects, feminist movements, and share of information, indigenous women have transmitted messages, challenged power, and resisted oppression.

## 6.7 Individual resistance

While collective resistance are powerful efforts manifested in the public sphere, there is a more hidden part of the resistance, which is exercised within the family, within your social circles, and which is expressed day by day. That is, internal resistance. According to James C. Scott (1985, 1990, as cited in Garduño, 2004), resistance is expressed in two ways: one open and one public. The former being the protests, marches, organizations, whereas the latter is found in the everyday. Internal resistance breaks with the internalized or normalized practices that have

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<sup>37</sup> Original part of transcript: uno de mis primeros objetivos es difundir lo que ha pasado para que a otras comunidades no les pase.



ceased to be considered harmful. While little attention has been given to internal resistance and frequently goes unnoticed, it is present, constant, and women have been the main actors.

During the interviews, it was commented on how indigenous women resist sexist practices within their homes. To provide a few examples, Nancy does not use color of clothing as gender signifiers (i.e. pink is for girls while blue is for boys). Moreover, Astrid voices to the male figures of her family, claiming that they should be involved in the domestic work as well, since it should not be an effort exclusive for women. Astrid further maintained that an important aspect of internal resistance is to focus on providing children with tools to recognize situations of gender violence, whether they are perpetrating it or experiencing it.

In addition to resistances related to gender violence, Érica shared some of the ways she resists at home. As she expressed:

Here, for example, at home, unlike many families in Mexico, we do not broadcast public television because we do not want to know anything about political campaigns, *telenovelas*, and those things, which have a lot of symbolic violence [...]. Resisting to watching public television, resisting to, for example, changing to meatless diet so as not to harm the animals, resisting to consuming soft drinks, resisting to compulsive shopping or buying from unnecessary brands, but rather using clothes from the communities, or second-hand clothes. So those things are ways of resisting. Because you resist capitalism, you resist symbolic violence, you resist structural violence.<sup>38</sup>

In line with Érica's insights, changing those practices that maintain stereotypes about indigenous people or consume products that do not benefit her community. Instead, actions within the family should be focused on challenging and breaking those habits that perpetrate symbolic and structural violence. This goes in line with Bourdieu's (1977) idea of *habitus*, that is, the embodiment of social structures and hierarchies that lead to symbolic violence. According to Bourdieu (1997), *habitus* is acquired through mimicry and often leads to the acceptance of the hegemonies of the social order. As an effect, Bourdieu (1988, as cited in

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<sup>38</sup> Original part of transcript: Aquí por ejemplo en la casa, a diferencia de muchas familias en México, pocas son las que no usamos televisión abierta, entonces acá en casa no usamos televisión abierta porque no queremos saber nada sobre las campañas políticas y las telenovelas, y esas cosas, que tienen bastante violencia simbólica [...]. El hecho de resistirme a usar televisión abierta, el hecho de resistirme, por ejemplo ahora a que hemos cambiado el plan de alimentación a comer carne para no dañar a los animales, el hecho de resistir a no consumir refrescos, el hecho de resistir, por ejemplo, a no comprar en exagerado o marcas que no tienen ni sentido comprarlas, sino más bien usar ropa de las comunidades y de preferencia que se usen, o ropa de segunda mano. Entonces esas cosas son formas de resistir. Porque resistes al capitalismo, resistes a las violencias simbólicas, resistes a la violencia estructural.

Smith, 2007), suggests the need to question and transform the conditions in which such habitus is produced.

Internal resistance, then, are those actions that even if they seem small, they create an impact. As Érica further proposed, this internal impact later transforms into collective resistance. In other words, from their individual actions, women can influence and inspire each other, thus develop group identifications with similar struggles and resistances.

### **6.8 Sisterhood, companionship, and empathy**

Another form of resistance that often goes unnoticed relates to sisterhood, companionship, and empathy. This involves taking care of oneself, caring for others, and working with respect and empathy. As mentioned previously, feminism practiced among indigenous women does not seek to exclude or delegitimize the diverse experiences of women. Instead, it enhances unity among women, a process of *luchar juntas*, or fight together, hand in hand.

Such resistance processes of indigenous women imply weaving a support system, which helps women to leave situations of violence, as well as providing emotional, social, and economic support. Nancy and Eitelia, for instance, work within support groups supporting women who experienced (sexual) violence. They both shared their joy in being part of a process that reassures and validates the experiences of women. In Nancy's words:

To me, [sisterhood] is extremely important [...]. That accompaniment, that support, that encouragement to say: "come on, yes we can." [...]. I can say that thanks to those women I endure. [...]. It is a moment when one seeks for them and say: "I have to vent." Look for that accompaniment.<sup>39</sup>

As such, indigenous women, such as Nancy and Eitelia, seek to create safe spaces in order to support each other.

Sisterhood and companionship require an important element: empathy. As América expressed:

Empathy is seeing yourself in the other. Not only accompanying the other, but seeing yourself in the other, being able to be sensitive to what is happening to the other. If we are not capable

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<sup>39</sup> Original part of transcript: Para mí es sumamente importante esa parte [...]. Ese acompañamiento, te dan ese apoyo, ese ánimo a decir: "vamos, sí se puede". [...]. Yo puedo decir que gracias a esas personas sigo. [...]. Y es un momento en que uno busca y dice: "me tengo que desahogar". Y pues buscar ese acompañamiento.

of that, we are going to think that what happens to the lady across the street whose daughter disappeared will never happen to us. Or that we will never be raped. Or that we will never lose our house, our home, our water, and so on. Not having empathy is thinking in a very selfish way of defending yourself, a human attitude of denying that it will never happen to you. Lies. Any injustice can happen to anyone [...]. So, it is empathy, it is sisterhood, it is to be human again.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, in line with the insights of América, empathy is crucial for understanding someone else's experiences. Altogether, sisterhood, companionship, and empathy require a process of experiencing the support processes *with* the others, so in that way, realities are transformed.

### 6.9 “What no one tells about resistance”

Thus far, I have explored and explained the various forms of resistance that indigenous women manifest, ranging from the reaffirmation of identity, defense of rights and collective action, to individual resistance and support systems. These series of transformations are crucial in the fight against structural and symbolic violence in Mexico. Nevertheless, while I was interviewing América, she mentioned what claims to be what few communicate when talking about resistance. On the one hand, the resistances of indigenous women must be valued, recognized, and remembered with the importance they deserve. On the other hand, however, they should also be approached carefully, and be conscientious, as América expressed, to not fall into romanticizing discourses, that is, thinking of resistance as something truthfully appealing or aesthetic.

First of all, it must be understood that, in many cases, resistance struggles are not a way of life that indigenous women necessarily choose. In other words, resistance processes should not be treated as something that is done "for pleasure". On the contrary, these processes and fights are difficult, tiring, and sometimes extremely violent. Many times, it is the circumstances

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<sup>40</sup> Original part of transcript: La empatía es verte en el otro, no solo acompañar al otro, sino verte en el otro, ser capaz de ser sensible a lo que le está pasando al otro. Si no somos capaces de eso, vamos a estar soñando [...] que a nosotros jamás nos va a pasar lo que le pasa a la señora de enfrente que es que le desaparecieron a la hija. O que a nosotros jamás nos va a pasar que la hayan violado. O que a nosotros jamás nos va a pasar que nos quiten nuestra casa, nuestro hogar, nuestra agua, etcétera. No tener empatía es un pensar, es un modo muy egoísta de defenderte quizá, como una actitud humana, y de negar que nunca te va a ocurrir. Mentira. A cualquiera nos puede pasar, cualquier injusticia [...]. Entonces, es la empatía, es la sororidad, es de verdad, a retomarnos como seres humanos, *volver* a ser humanos.

that lead indigenous women to participate in processes of resistance, which often results in sacrifices within one's personal life.

Then, what happens 'behind the scenes' of the struggles, the fights, the protests, and so on, must also be recognized. In the words of América:

[Resistance] also has another side that remains unspoken. And yesterday when talking to a comrade, she said: "even within the resistance it becomes romanticized. As if 'oh, what a beautiful'". And well, forgive us, but no. It is tiring. They don't realize that our life degrades in front of us: projects, dreams, quality of life... I mean, who likes if they ask: "Hey, will you look pretty while you resist, while not eating well, not sleeping well, having nightmares, having insomnia, feeling anxious constantly?" Well no. In the end, many times that is what we go through when we resist. Nobody asks us if we are having a rough time at home, if we are struggling to fall asleep, if we are economically stable, even when we lose your job or our family disintegrates. A lot happens in the resistance.<sup>41</sup>

Then, when exploring the forms of resistance of indigenous women, I argue that it is important to look into its multiple facets. The processes and fights within resistance are not to be viewed through a simplistic lens. Instead, recognize and remember its multiple sides: the ones that have to be celebrated, the ones that create change, but also the struggles within the resistance itself.

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<sup>41</sup> Original part of transcript: [La resistencia] también tiene otro lado que no se habla y no se dice. Y ayer justamente platicando, escuchando a una compañera, decía: "incluso dentro de la resistencia se romantiza. Que 'ay, qué bonito resisten'". Y pues, perdónenos, pero no. Es cansado. No se dan cuenta que la vida se nos degrada: los proyectos, los sueños, la calidad de vida... o sea, a quién le gusta si le preguntan: "oye, ¿para verte bonito vas a resistir pero resulta que no vas a comer bien, que no vas a poder dormir bien, que vas a tener pesadillas, que vas a tener insomnio, que vas a estar angustiado constantemente, que vas a estar en la zozobra en muchas ocasiones?" Pues no. O sea, porque al final la resistencia, muchas veces eso es lo que transitamos para resistir. Nadie nos pregunta qué es lo que se padece en la vida cotidiana, adentro cerrando tu casa, si te estás desvelando, incluso económicamente no te alcanza, o incluso pierdes el trabajo por participar o tu familia se desintegra. Ocurren muchas cosas en la resistencia.

## Chapter 7. Conclusion and discussion

Previous resistance movements of indigenous women, such as those from the EZLN, inspired me to investigate the following research question: How can the resistance, activism, and insights of Mexican indigenous women influence the fight against structural and symbolic violence? To answer such question, I gathered data through background research and eight semi-structured interviews of indigenous women from the states of Oaxaca, Veracruz, and the State of Mexico. My main purposes through this journey were to, through a co-construction of knowledge, gain more insight into their perspectives and experiences, show that indigenous women are active subjects of social and political change, and contribute to the creation of a historical memory of the movements of indigenous women.

Moreover, to support this thesis topic, I delved into the theories and perspectives of decolonial feminism, a movement that questions the central issues of feminism and is useful to understand the complex situations in which violence and oppression against indigenous women take place (Espinosa Miñoso, 2016). Looking at the resistances, activism, and insights of indigenous women's movements through a decolonial feminist lens is useful to recognize that struggles and resistances are multifaceted, as well as realize that a movement that claims to be liberating may be an additional source of oppression. Firstly, I considered that not all experiences, struggles, or achievements of women are the same across different contexts (Talpade Mohanty, 2003; Arruza, Bhattacharya, & Fraser, 2019). There are a number of 'layers' or factors within particular contexts that, when not taken into account, may fall into generalizations and exclusions. Likewise, those struggles or achievements that do not follow a particular feminist agenda, will result in a binary logic where the Western feminist agendas define the experiences of the "Third World woman" as a homogeneous 'powerless' group that requires salvation. In this way, feminism may fall into colonizing practices (Talpade Mohanty, 2003).

Decolonizing feminism also pays attention to how the label 'feminism' can be problematic. The exclusionary practices within feminism has led many women to not feel identified under that label (Talpade Mohanty, 2003). Whether women decide referring themselves in a different way, it should not be devalued or ignored.

Then, the way that indigenous women struggles and resistances were approached was through an intersectional lens, that is, through the consideration of multiple factors that

intersect, or overlap, in the experience of marginalization and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). For indigenous women, some of the intersections may include gender, 'race', social class, and language. The theory of intersectionality also allows to consider that factors intersecting individuals or a group of people are dependent on time and context. As such, decolonial feminism and intersectionality are useful in understanding how indigenous women experience oppression and how they relate to feminism (Crenshaw, 1989; Talpade Mohanty, 2003).

As proposed by the aforementioned theories, before providing an answer to how the resistances of indigenous women influence the fight against structural and symbolic violence, it was necessary to consider the context in which violence emerges. Therefore, I first explored the history of colonization in Mexico, since it is considered a significant explanation for the oppressions that indigenous women in Mexico experience up until this day. Colonization began with the arrival of the Spaniards during the 15<sup>th</sup> century to "discovered" land with the purpose to obtain new land and resources (Dussel, 1992). From this moment, the Spanish soldiers conquered the Aztec empire through a disproportionate use of violence. Indigenous populations were displaced from their lands, assassinated, and enslaved by the Spaniards. For indigenous women, their body became another territory to be conquered, dominated, and controlled, but this time in the form of rape and sexual abuse (Talpade Mohanty, 2003). During this process, the concept of the (sexual) Other emerged. After the conquest, the process of colonization began. In other words, the colonizers imposed customs, politics, and economic systems in order to control, assimilate, and "modernize" society (Dussel, 1992; Dorronsoro, 2013).

Another system of oppression that took place throughout colonialism is capitalism. The extraction of silver was one of the most common modes of capital after and during the colonial era (Langue, 1991). Furthermore, the use of capitalism as a political and economic system created hierarchies between people in which factors such as 'race' and gender were considered legitimate to justify exploitation of some individuals over others (Trejo & Altamirano, 2016; Hudis, 2018). As such, indigenous individuals were placed at the bottom of the socio-economic scale and were often used for cheap labor. In the case of indigenous women, capitalism contributed to the feminization of domestic labor, that is, it became mystified, leading women to be reduced into the private sphere (Federici, 2004; Paillacar, 2017; Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, 2016).

During and after the Independence and the Revolution in Mexico, racist practices persisted, to the extent that indigenous populations were considered a "problem", and the

solution consisted on cultural and social integration into the mestizo national identity. Indigenous communities had to resign their language, customs, and traditions, resulting in the loss of indigenous identities (Ruiz, 2002; Trejo & Altamirano, 2016; Gall, 2004). Similarly, the mestizo woman—a ‘perfect’ balance between indigenous and European—became a national symbol, an identity that should be striven for.

Sadly, these systems and dynamics of oppression have persisted for longer than 500 years in Mexico. Colonial and capitalist influences translate into different forms of violence, including sexist violence, racist violence, political and economic violence, and repression. Such forms of violence are characterized by the use of intimidation, threat, imprisonment, disappearances, and murder, resulting in exclusion and silencing (Butler, 1996; Gall, 2004; Martínez Espinoza, 2012, Duyos, 2019; Spivak, 1988).

After understanding the history and the context in which violence against indigenous women takes place, I showed how the resistances, activisms, and insights of Mexican indigenous women influence the fight against structural and symbolic violence. The movements of resistance of indigenous women were understood as the capacity to reject those actions and discourses that oppress, as the fight (individual or collective) that challenges and transforms powerful structures of domination, and as the process of enduring with this fight. The results are summarized as follows. First, indigenous women resist to the negative notion of the indigenous identity that was constructed during the colonial era by turning it into something positive. This means that indigenous women engage in a process of reappropriation and redefinition of identity, which is directly linked to realizations of belongingness and the construction of autonomy as a social and political action (Hernández Aguilar, 2010; Smeke de Zonana, 2000; Galeano, 2010). As a result, indigenous women construct themselves as subjects, reversing the power to decide over their self-definition.

Secondly, the process of reappropriation of identity encourages social and political agency, which is related to the defense of rights. The indigenous women interviewed in this thesis shared how they have raised their voices and made themselves heard within and outside their community. Through this defense, indigenous women resist to the violations made to their rights, and defend what had been taken away from them before, such as the right for autonomy, self-determination, and a life free of violence. Similarly, indigenous women reiterate that understanding and questioning the established rights within the law is a crucial step in the

avoidance of perpetrating violent dynamics. As such, this form of resistance seeks to transform mentalities.

Thirdly, indigenous women may manifest their actions of resistance in two ways: one collective or public, and one internal (Scott, 1985, 1990, as cited in Garduño, 2004). The former is manifested through social movements, such as (feminist) marches and protests, and organizational groups or collectives. Collective movements resist the idea that indigenous women belong to the private sphere incapable of social and political action, and it aims to share information and inspire other women. Internal resistance, on the other hand, is a form of resistance that often goes unnoticed, but it is crucial for the fight against structural and symbolic violence. This resistance is performed day by day within the family or social circles and it is useful to stop habits that perpetrate violence, such as gendered roles and stereotypes.

Next, an important aspect of resistance movements is sisterhood, companionship, and empathy. Creating support systems allows indigenous women to support each other emotionally, socially, and economically. The indigenous women interviewed for this thesis communicated that empathy is an important factor in the fight, as it constitutes understanding and respecting someone else's struggles and experiences.

Last, but definitely not least, I gained insight from the interviews that resistance movements should on one hand be recognized with the value they deserve, but at the same time, they should be approached carefully. This means that, when talking about resistance, it should not fall into romanticizing discourses. While these resistances, activisms, and insights must be recognized, it is crucial to acknowledge that there is a process behind it that can be tiring, arduous, and often violent.

Therefore, in conclusion, I have demonstrated that the resistances, activisms, and insights of Mexican indigenous women influence the fight against structural and symbolic violence. Indigenous women have fought actively to reaffirm themselves as subjects of social and political change, transform mentalities, and break with dominant forms of oppression. I showed that the resistance movements of indigenous women are multifaceted and ever-present. Indigenous women have been main agents of change within the country. Without them, change and transformation would not be possible. And albeit this change has been tough and effortful, the work of indigenous women should not go unnoticed.

It must be added that what was investigated throughout this thesis represents only a fraction of the struggles and resistances of indigenous women in Mexico. Oppression and



violence against indigenous women are a highly complex phenomenon and therefore may involve other influences that were not mentioned in this thesis. Similarly, there may be additional forms of resistance that differ both within and between contexts. It would be interesting to expand this research to more areas in Mexico to gain additional insight into how other forms of resistance influence the fight against structural and symbolic violence. Also, given that I interviewed two women who identified themselves as *aformestiza*, it would be valuable for future research to delve into the struggles, experiences, and resistance movements of such groups.

The situation of indigenous women in Mexico has changed over the years, but it is crucially important to voice, remember, and reiterate how systems of power continue to cross the lives of indigenous women. It is necessary to reverse the current deceptive democratic system, as well as the social, cultural, and political order. It is for this reason that I invite others to listen, understand, and learn about the different realities that exist within the country. Anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal, and anti-racist transformation is desired and necessary for the construction of a better place.

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## Appendix 1: Demographic information of interviewees

Table 1 lists the interviewees and their demographic information.

*Table 1: Demographic information of interviewees*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age (years)</b>	<b>Place of birth</b>	<b>Indigenous identity/ belongingness to indigenous community</b>
Nancy Martínez Cruz	32	San Juan Quiotepec, Ixtlán de Juárez, Oaxaca	Chinanteca
Astrid Martínez López	19	Oteapan, Veracruz	Oteapan community
Evitelia Pacheco Ramírez	43	Emiliano Zapata, San Juan Cotzocón, Oaxaca	Mixe
Rosalinda Dionicio Sánchez	38	San Juan del Progreso, Valles Centrales, Oaxaca	Zapoteco
Érica Fuentes Roque	34	El Llano de la Soledad, El Barrio, Oaxaca	Afromestiza
Aline Castellanos Jurado	-	Mexico City, Mexico, lived most of her life in Oaxaca	Afromestiza: Mixteco and Black.
América del Valle	40	Atenco, State of Mexico, Mexico	Indigenous peoples of Atenco
Beatriz Hernández Bautista	39	Zimatlan de Lázaro Cárdenas, Putla, Oaxaca	Mixteco

## Appendix 2: Interview guide

*Spanish version:*

### Preguntas de introducción/datos demográficos:

1. Plátame sobre ti; ¿cuál es tu nombre?, ¿cuál es tu edad?, ¿en dónde creciste?, ¿a qué comunidad indígena perteneces?
2. ¿Cómo fue tu infancia?
3. ¿A qué te dedicas? ¿cómo llegaste a tener ese puesto? ¿por cuánto tiempo llevas trabajando en eso? ¿qué es lo que más te gusta de tu trabajo?

### Preguntas sobre problemas sociales: racismo/sexismo/clasismo:

1. ¿Cuáles crees que sean las amenazas más grandes hacia las mujeres de tu comunidad?/¿qué problemas principales reconoces?
2. ¿Cuál es el impacto del gobierno y la sociedad hacia las comunidades indígenas?
3. ¿Cuáles son los estereotipos que la sociedad tiene de las mujeres indígenas?
4. ¿Crees que hay racismo en México? ¿Por qué? ¿Cómo crees que afecta a las mujeres indígenas?
5. ¿Crees que hay sexismo en México? ¿Por qué? ¿Cómo crees que afecta a las mujeres indígenas?
6. ¿Cuál ha sido una vez en donde te has sentido atacada/agredida/discriminada por otros sectores de la sociedad?
7. ¿Crees que sus derechos son reconocidos por el gobierno y el resto de la sociedad? ¿Por qué?
8. ¿Por qué crees que es importante hablar sobre los derechos de las mujeres indígenas?

### Preguntas sobre feminismo/activismo:

1. ¿Qué te viene a la mente cuando escuchas la palabra “indígena”?
2. ¿Qué te viene a la mente cuando escuchas la palabra “activismo” o “feminismo”?
3. ¿Te identificas como feminista? ¿Por qué?

4. ¿Crees que el feminismo y la identidad indígena se relacionan? ¿Cómo?
5. ¿Qué es lo que te inspiró para dedicarte al feminismo?
6. ¿Qué significa la resistencia para ti?
7. ¿Cuál es su principal objetivo en su lucha?
8. ¿Cómo se organizan tú y tus compañeras para luchar y ejercer sus derechos?
9. ¿Qué hacen para asegurarse que sus voces sean escuchadas por el gobierno y la sociedad?
10. ¿Qué acciones realizan tú y tus compañeras en contra de la opresión?
11. ¿Cómo te sientes cuando ejerces esta lucha? ¿qué pasa por tu mente?
12. ¿Crees que la sororidad es importante? ¿Qué significa trabajar juntas? ¿qué significa el respeto para ti?
13. ¿Cuál es el rol de la educación en esta lucha?
14. ¿Qué cambios te gustaría ver dentro de tu comunidad? ¿qué cambios te gustaría ver en el país?
15. ¿Qué es lo que te da fuerza para seguir adelante?

Preguntas de cierre:

1. ¿Crees que la situación de las mujeres indígenas ha cambiado a través de los años? ¿qué cambios específicos has reconocidos? ¿Qué falta por hacer?
2. ¿Qué le dirías al gobierno o a la gente que no respeta las luchas de las mujeres indígenas?

*English version:*

Demographics / introduction questions:

1. Tell me about yourself; What is your name? What is your age? Where did you grow up? What indigenous community do you belong to?
2. How was your childhood?
3. What do you do? How did you come to have that position? How long have you been working on it? What do you like most about your job?

Questions on social problems: sexism / classism / racism:

1. What do you think are the biggest threats to women in your community? / What main problems do you recognize?
2. What is the impact of the government and society towards indigenous communities?
3. What are the stereotypes that society has of indigenous women?
4. Do you think there is racism in Mexico? Why? How do you think it affects indigenous women?
5. Do you think there is sexism in Mexico? Why? How do you think it affects indigenous women?
6. What has been one time where you have felt attacked/discriminated against by other sectors of society?
7. Do you think your rights are recognized by the government and the rest of society? Why?
8. Why do you think it is important to talk about the rights of indigenous women?

Questions on activism / feminism:

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word "indigenous"?
2. What comes to mind when you hear the word "activism" or "feminism"?
3. Do you identify as a feminist? Why?
4. Do you think that your identity as a feminist and your identity as indigenous are related? How?
5. What inspired you to dedicate yourself to feminism?

6. What does resistance mean to you?
7. What is your main objective in your fight?
8. How do you and your comrades organize to fight and exercise your rights?
9. What do you do to ensure that your voices are heard by government and society?
10. What actions do you and your comrades perform against oppression?
11. How do you feel when you exercise this fight? What's on your mind?
12. Do you think sisterhood is important? What does working as a collective mean to you?  
What does 'respect' mean to you?
13. What is the role of education in this fight?
14. What changes would you like to see in the country?
15. What gives you the strength to keep going?

Closing questions:

1. Do you think the situation of indigenous women has changed over the years? What is there left to do?
2. What would you say to the government or people who do not respect the fight of indigenous women?