

Violence against women, rights and citizenship in rural and indigenous contexts of Mexico

Soledad González Montes

El Colegio de México / msgonza@colmex.mx

Abstract: This article reviews recent contributions to understanding the problem of violence against women in rural and indigenous contexts in Mexico. Its main argument is that the struggle against domestic violence has been a central feature of the work carried out by rural women's organizations which questions social relations that oppress them. The search for justice has also been fundamental both for individual and organized women, as well as for the affirmation of new ideas concerning women's roles. In the process of questioning the established gender order, such organizations have appropriated national and international legislation to support their demands, and have become important sources of change for the gender representations and practices in their communities.

Key words: gender, domestic violence, rural women, indigenous women, citizenship in Mexico.

Resumen: Este artículo hace un recorrido por un conjunto de contribuciones recientes al conocimiento del problema de la violencia contra las mujeres en contextos rurales e indígenas. Argumenta que la lucha contra la violencia doméstica ha sido un aspecto medular del trabajo realizado por las organizaciones de mujeres rurales que cuestionan las relaciones que les resultan opresivas. Un recurso fundamental ha sido la búsqueda de justicia y la afirmación de nuevas concepciones sobre los derechos de las mujeres y sobre el lugar que deben ocupar en sus comunidades. En este proceso, las organizaciones se apropian de las nuevas normatividades nacionales e internacionales para apoyar sus cuestionamientos al orden social vigente, constituyéndose en un importante factor que apunta hacia posibles transformaciones en las representaciones y prácticas de género en contextos rurales.

Palabras clave: género, violencia doméstica, mujeres rurales, indígenas, ciudadanía en México.

Introduction: from the “naturalization” of violence against women to its recognition as a problem¹

Not long ago violence against women was not a topic with much attention in the field of rural studies, when I started to research on peasant families in the early 1980 decade, violence appeared as a recurrent topic in the histories of life of my female informants and in the tales they made on their quotidian lives. As a matter of fact, many an interviewed women pointed out that this was the gravest problem they faced, together with violence. This contrasted with the almost inexistence of references in the bibliography I checked back then on familial relations in Mexico. Save honorable exceptions (among which outstanding is the groundbreaking work by Oscar Lewis), violence against women was not a topic of research, and its possible reaches, meanings and consequences were not questioned.

Along the 1980's, this situation underwent radical changes, to a good extent thanks to the approach of female researchers to the so called studies “of the woman” at first, then “of the women” in plural, and finally “gender studies”. In addition to the theoretical renewal these studies meant, for some of these academicians it was very important their involvement with some organizations which had been born independently or were part of mixed organizations of agricultural producers, but whose common characteristic was to work with women.² These organizations opened spaces for the participation of women, where they could share their needs, problems and aspirations. Among the activities they carried out the development of legal and therapeutic support for the victims of sexual and domestic violence was very important, as well as the struggle to “make the problem visible” with the end that public institutions recognized it and set up programs to

¹ I am grateful to Reyna Gabriela Hernández, research assistant from PIEM, for her collaboration in searching bibliography for this work.

² Distinguishable for being pioneers the Group of Women from San Cristóbal Las Casas, the Rosario Castellanos House of Woman from Oaxaca, Maseualsiamej Mosenyolchicauanij, from Cuetzalan, Puebla, and the Network of Rural Promoters which operates in several states.

deal with it. They had a fundamental role in making domestic violence come out from the private silence to enter into the agendas of public policies and into academic research (Valdez, 2004).³

The questioning to violence as something “natural” was the indispensable step to become a object-of-study problem, and eventually, a specialized research line in the 1990’s decade. At first, the researches were mainly oriented to expose the multiple links between violence and health, they sought to record the damages caused by violence, calculate the loss of years of healthy life it provokes, demonstrate that it generates high economic costs and that it is an obstacle to prevent unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. This sort of researches, which were carried at international level, helped multilateral organizations with power to create lineaments of public policies, such as the Pan-American Health Organization and World Health Organization, to recognize violence against women as a public health problem (Heise *et al.*, 1994).

Other of the initial tasks was to show by means of figures the magnitude of the problem; in Mexico the first national survey that included a quite extensive on violence was the National Survey on Reproductive Health (Encuesta Nacional sobre Salud Reproductiva), carried out in 1998 on the population affiliated to Seguro Social. In 2003, the two first national surveys entirely directed to measure the prevalence of diverse forms of violence; both were replied in 2006 and they allowed verifying that violence against women is a first-order social problem, particularly domestic violence (INEGI *et al.*, 2003 and 2006; INSP and SSA, 2003, 2006)

The National Survey on the Dynamic of Relationships at the Households (Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares) (INEGI *et al.*, 2006) found that 43.2% of 15-year-old women suffered some incident of domestic violence along their last intimate relationship. Out of them, 37.5% declared having received aggressions to control their incomes; 20% suffered from physical violence; and 9% declared having suffered

³ Rosario Valdez has outlined the trajectory of the appearance of these organizations in different points of the country, mainly in urban contexts; whereas Aída Hernández has referred to the role of the Group of Women from San Cristóbal A.C. (Valdez, 2004; Hernández, 2004); however, there are still the stories of other organizations.

several forms of intimidation or domination to have sexual intercourse with their consent. Urban population declared percentages of emotional violence and economic violence from husbands to wives higher than rural population, while the prevalence of sexual violence turned out significantly higher in rural contexts; in relation to physical violence there are no major differences.

Domestic violence is so frequent that one of the pioneering researches in the topic called it “a quotidian fact” (Ramírez and Uribe, 1993). Although the prevalence of violence against Mexican women (including its most extreme form: femicide) are quite high, it is not possible to forget that violence between men is much more lethal. This is especially true in rural contexts, where one of the first causes of death among men in productive ages is homicide (Freyermuth, 2004; González Montes, 1998; De Keijzer, 1998); in spite of this dramatic fact, its implications are scantily researched. The studies on masculinities (a rapidly expanding field) have a lot to contribute to understand the comprehension of the problem which, as we have seen, has exacerbated there where drug consumption, drug dealing and territorial wars between cartels have expanded.

Nowadays we already have much more information than twenty years ago on violence against rural women, thanks to specifically devoted studies on the topic. In the light of my experience, the most complete and complex contribution to the understanding of the social, cultural and psychological roots of gender violence in an indigenous context is, undoubtedly, the one by Graciela Freyermuth on Chenalhó (Chiapas Highlands). This research explains the reasons why violence is one of the main risk factors in maternity and proposes that the problem should be approached from two perspectives: on the one side, the processes of identity construction, in the framework of deeply hierarchical gender relations; and on the other, the broader structural context, by means of which indigenous communities are subjected to violent processes that involve the greater society and which are expressed as diverse forms of discrimination, among which is distinguishable the lack of adequate attention from healthcare institutions.

In relation to the role of violence in shaping feminine identities and attitudes that place women in a vulnerable position, Freyermuth points out that in Chenalhó:

From tender ages, women interiorize, by means of familial educative practices, the need to be submissive and obedient and not to show their discomforts and preoccupations. The integration of these representations is carried out under severe corrective procedures, many of which imply permanent physical damage. These experiences prior to marriage enable relations of domestic violence, and mainly a passive attitude before it, not only of the victim, but the family and even the community (Freyermuth, 2004: 83-84).

In a similar manner, in other two regions of the country (southeastern State of Mexico and Sierra Norte de Puebla) I witnessed that most of the violence against women is given a corrective value when it is applied by the head of the household. This is to say, the generic and familial model vest the authority in the head to “discipline” the other family members, physically punishing them when they do not fulfill the obligations of service and obedience assigned by the role, in such manner that blows are seen as a legitimate prerogative of parents and husbands.⁴ As it occurs in Chiapas Highlands, in the two contexts I studied, judicial authorities (either exercisers of positive or consuetudinary right) share with the population they serve “the conception that there is legitimate violence and individuals authorized to exercise it” (Hernández, 2004: 366; González Montes, 2006, 1998; Martínez and Mejía, 1997).

In this article my objective is to present researches that demonstrate that women do not remain passive in the face of the violence against them, but they confront it in multiple ways, which range from individual to collective responses. One of the most important individual answers is to resort to authorities searching for justice; here I am interested in approaching the problem of the distance between the enunciation of rights in favor of women, in national and international regulations, and the reality of justice administration. On the side of collective responses, I would like to refer to the contributions from recent researches that describe the ways in which organizations are using these new regulations, both in promoting women’s

⁴ According to the interviews and information from judicial files where the charges of women are written, the triggers of domestic violence: the drive of men to control their wives, to punish them for their alleged or real disobediences or failure in their duties, infidelity suspicion, jealousy, alcoholism and the intervention of relatives (González Montes, 2006: 356; Martínez and Mejía, 1997).

rights among judicial institutions and as a broader effort to transform the cultural representations on the countryside gender relations. Indubitably, these works contribute to renew rural studies and enrich, in particular, the reflection on the role of construction of citizenship and democracy from the perspective of the needs and demands of women.

Violence, rights and citizenship

In a globalized world, the successive generations of rights emanated from United Nations had a decisive influence on what is considered the updated patterns of modernity in the concert of nations. The governments that partake the construction of this new symbolic and normative order, from which they can hardly escape, by doing so they acquire commitments that sometimes make them modify national legislations and to create public policies and programs to fulfill the conventions and agreements they have signed. This is an important part of the context where official discourses on the rights of women are generated and wherein the programs aimed at preventing and assisting domestic violence are framed. Were the most advanced regulations put into practice, they undoubtedly would lead to deep social transformations, toward widespread equality and respect to women's rights. Thus far their principal role is that of utopias to be reached.

Here I am going to briefly refer to two sets of conventions and international regulations which were signed by the Mexican government, which influenced the legislative changes and which besides are used by the organizations of women (including the indigenous) to support their claims. The first set refers to the rights of women, and the second to sexual and reproductive rights. Both sets define women's rights as human rights, they establish the link between no-discrimination because of gender, the full exercise of feminine citizenship and the struggle against violence toward women.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)⁵ was the first large-scoped international instrument that specifically recognized women's rights. In 1993 the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women recognized

⁵ CEDAW was approved by UN General Assembly in 1979 and ratified by the Mexican government.

violence against women as a transgression to human rights. This implies that in the private sphere, where most of this violence occurs, the State has range of action (Torres, 2004: 325-326). Another significant step has been the approval of the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará, 1994, ratified by Mexico in 1998) (INSP and SSA, 2003: 16).

Separately, the discourse on sexual and reproductive rights has had an important role in the struggle of women for the appropriation of their bodies ever since it was legitimized in the International Conference on Population and Development (held in Cairo in 1994). Reproductive health is a field in dispute because of several actors which take part to define it according to their own ends and interests; a narrow approach (present in many healthcare services) considers that reproductive health refers to family planning and afterbirth maternal-infantile health. A broader vision incorporates prevention of STD and actions on HIV-AIDS. Moreover, feminism has worked to produce a much more complex and broader concept in terms of the rights of the individuals to decide on their sexuality and reproduction free from coercion and violence. From this perspective, body, sexuality and reproduction are politicized to become key elements in what has been called “the construction of the citizenship of women” (Lamas, 2001; Ortiz, 1999; Szasz and Salas, 2008).

According to Lamas (2001), initially the fundamental axes in the defense of reproductive rights were sexual education, access to safe contraceptive methods, abortion as the last resource and rejection of forced sterilization. Later on, the agenda incorporated sexual rights and the right to choose a partner, to have sexual intercourse without the risk of unexpected pregnancy and STD, in addition to the claim of not suffering discrimination from their sexual preferences (Rojas, 2001). Recently, the emphasis of sexual rights has been placed on the acceptance of sexual diversity, as well as the rejection of stigmatization and exclusion of those who do not fit into the prevailing moral codes on sexuality. Those who advocate for the sexual rights propose they are considered as human rights, which require the creation of conditions to be exercised and guarantees to respect and protect them (Szasz and Salas, 2008: 17).

The Mexican government has signed and ratified international conventions which I have just referred to, and along the last decade has incorporated the issue of violence against women into the agenda of public policies and into national legislation as well. As we will see further in the text, the organizations that defend women's rights in the Mexican countryside utilize all of these instruments in the work they perform. The most recent and significant legislative change in relation to the problem we are dealing with is the General Law of Access of Women to a Life Free from Violence, approved early in 2007. Even if I have not found yet studies on the use given to this law by rural organizations, I cannot spare it as it constitutes a historical milestone for our country and is one of the most complete in this respect in the continent. It defines violence against women as:

Any action or omission based on their gender that causes them psychological, physical, patrimonial, economic, sexual harm, suffering or death, both in the private and public spheres. **Such violence is based on submission, discrimination and control exercised on women in all the spheres of their lives, affecting their liberty, dignity, security and intimacy, thus violating the exercise of their rights** (Diario Oficial de la Federación, February 1st, 2007).

What is more, it established the National System and the Integral Program to prevent, assist, punish and eradicate violence against women.

Exercising the rights: women in the search for justice

A key word for us who are interested in the problem of violence is what the relation between the regulations on the rights of women and the actual situation in respect to the attention of violence victims and their possibilities of access to justice is. Valdez (2004: 441) states in this sense that "the achievements reflected on the international agreements and national laws as for violence have not reached most of the population they should protect. Consequently, there is large chasm between the first and the reality of women when they denounce or claim for support...". In spite of this issue, it has been scarcely studied; so far researches have been concentrated on three large thematic areas: the measurement of violence exercised by

men toward their heterosexual partners, the relation of this violence with diverse factors and its consequences for women (Ramírez, 2006).

The 2008 Survey on Health and Rights of Indigenous Women (*Encuesta de Salud y Derechos de las Mujeres Indígenas*, ENSADEMI 2008) explores the issue of the search for institutional support from offended women and the attention they obtain, in eight regions, where 40% of the population or more speaks an indigenous language.⁶ The survey reveals that in spite of the heavy load of structural violence (characterized by poverty and marginalization) and gender violence women suffer, about a third of those who declared some form of domestic violence in the last 12 months and about 40% of those who suffered physical and/or sexual violence, specifically, resorted to authorities to press charges (INSP, 2008; González Montes and Mojarro, in print). This is twice as much as the national percentage recorded by the 2003 National Survey on Violence against Women, (*Encuesta Nacional sobre Violencia contra las Mujeres*, ENVIM 2003) (INSP and SSA, 2003: 116).⁷ A possible explanation of the difference is that indigenous communities have a lengthy tradition of resolving personal problems before the local authorities, and the interviewed women participate in this practice, in spite of all the obstacles they face to access the institutions that administrate justice.

Resorting to authorities may be seen as part of the tactics that women unfold to try to stop violence and improve the terms of the marital relation. Through denounce, women seek that authorities punish and/or repay the offence, or more frequently that the matrimonial pact reformulates on a different basis, more favorable for them, so that the husband does not continue mistreating them, and establish better conditions for coexistence. Denouncing requires courage; it expresses a form of resistance to conditions that are no longer acceptable and challenges the notion of the violated rights. It is an individual action (sometimes supported by the family, sometimes not) which takes place on the framework of collective representations and practices around gender relations and women's rights.

⁶ ENSADEMI 2008 is the first survey entirely devoted to indigenous population and it was applied to the users of IMSS-Oportunidades and Secretariat of Health healthcare centers (INSP, 2008).

⁷ ENSADEMI 2008 was proposed by the very team that designed ENVIM 2003, so both are comparable.

In indigenous rural communities, looking for the authority to intervene is one of the possible ways to settle interpersonal conflicts, especially when it is not possible to resort to other alternatives (such as the intervention of informal mediators) with no favorable results. Accessing local justice instances is, by and large, relatively easy, and the rural population has a long history of continual use of them. The judicial files show that as of the Colony up to now, women have resorted to these institutions, even if in their case the access has been blocked by difficulties and limitations of different kinds, attributable both to the adverse situations women live and the unfavorable or inoperative answers they usually receive from the functionaries.⁸

In spite of all the obstacles they must face to access justice administration, “women are usually assiduous users of local courts” (Sierra, 2004: 119). Case studies carried out in diverse parts of the country show they want authorities to intervene in order to halt the mistreating, to punish those responsible, to force them to repair the harm they have made, or to set new conditions in views of improving their quotidian coexistence (Chenaut, 2001; González, 2006; Hernández, 2004; Martínez and Mejía, 1997; Sierra, 2004; Vallejo, 2004). These researches, as the one performed by Amnesty International (2008) in other rural and urban contexts of the country, have pinpointed that authorities are generally more concerned about reaching a conciliatory agreement between the parts than guaranteeing the rights of the women and their security and physical integrity.

In this sense, it has been documented that authorities normally minimize the problems exposed by women and they urge them to fulfill the role assigned by the gender model, which includes the obligation of the “good wife” to subordinate her husband “for the sake of the family” and in particular for the children. Despite the heavy pressures they receive to desist on their claims, some of them dares to take their cases to superior judicial instances when they do not solve them at local level, either because of the severity of the injuries and crimes committed against them (so they require to be treated through the penal way), or because they have no support from

⁸ For the Colonial time, see Stern (1999); for the end of Profiriató, González Montes and Iracheta (2000).

local authorities. Unfortunately these studies have verified that in spite of the victims' efforts to reach justice, the usual thing is that their cases are never solved by a verdict, but they remain eternally delayed (Amnesty International 2008; Martínez and Mejía, 1997).

The appropriation of the rights in the collective struggle against violence

Numerous are the researches describing the strategies used by rural women to try to improve their life conditions of their families, in particular their participation in different organizations, among which most of them promote the functioning of income-generating productive processes; in these spaces it is common that besides discussing the state of the projects, women analyze the problems they have because of their gender, both at their households and in the public sphere (González, 2002). Recurrently, when they discuss their problems there and in other organizational spaces, violence arises as one of the largest obstacles in their lives, as it restricts their possibilities to make decisions in different spheres, from the most intimate and private of reproduction, to the most public of participation in organizations and in the local government (Artía, 2005; Mejía *et al.*, 2003; Villa 2003; Hernández, 2004).

The struggle against violence has become, therefore, one of the core aspects of the work carried out by the organization of rural women. In the face of the limitations of the responses public institutions give the mistreated women who appeal to them, the organizations have appropriated the international and national discourses on women's rights, for they are useful instruments to defend those who have experienced violence when they reclaim before judicial institutions, as well as for the pedagogic work they do to transform the local notions of the place of women in society, in the road to attain more equitable gender relations.

In this struggle the organizations have unfolded a great creative capacity, utilizing multiple strategies; they hold workshops to reflect, discuss and "sensitize", not only with women but also with men, healthcare providers and authorities. They prepare and spread radio programs, and frequently they interact with local institutions of health and justice, with which they organize joint activities, at the same time they question their deficiencies

and exert pressure to transform them. We now have some studies that have started to describe these experiences (Artúa, 2005; Terven, in process), and also the testimonies and analyses of the leaders of the very organizations (Sánchez, 2005; Villa, 2003), yet this is a field that requires more research.

A very well documented case is that of Maseualsiamej Mosenyolchicauanij (*Indigenous Women Who Work Together*), a cooperative of artisan women from Cuetzalan (Sierra Norte of Puebla) which from the beginning of the 1990's decade organizes workshops on domestic violence, women's workloads, their rights and human rights (Martínez, 2000). Maseualsiamej participates in regional, national and international forums and networks of human and civil rights; to strengthen the position of women in their search for respect to their rights it invokes the new national laws and international agreements. Hence, in different moments the members of the cooperative have analyzed and discussed the Law on Women of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation and diverse instruments such as the Official Norm 190 of the Secretariat of Health (2000) and the Law to Prevent, Sanction and Assist Cases of Domestic Violence of the State of Puebla (Martínez and Mejía, 1997; Mejía *et al.*, 2003).

Something similar has occurred there where the Committees for a Maternity Without Risks and other healthcare programs have gathered authorities, non-governmental organizations and healthcare providers to elaborate and unfold regional action plans. An interesting aspect is that the legitimacy accomplished by the discourse of reproductive health among healthcare providers has opened the possibility that organizations such as Maseualsiamej carry out activities in collaboration with local institutions, for instance, in aspects such as sexual education of youths, maternal death prevention, sensitization on the problem of violence and the need to timely detect it. Reproductive rights are specially used in work with women and youths to support the idea of respect to personal decisions, as well as demand public services that allow exercising the decisions (for instance, in relation to family planning), and denouncing the violation of these rights (for instance,

when sterilizations are performed without the consent of the women).⁹ In the cases of Maseualsiamej and the House of the Indigenous Woman in Cuetzalan, work with authorities has been extended to the new Indigenous Court, installed in the municipal head as of 2002 (Terven, in process).

The International Forum of Indigenous Women, where representative of Mexican organizations¹⁰ participate, warns that in the case of indigenous women it is indispensable to take into account that gender violence is marked by the belonging of women to peoples whose ethnic identities and collective rights must be recognized and respected. More so, violence against women shall be defined “not only by gender discrimination in indigenous and non-indigenous contexts, but also by a context of continuous colonization and militarism, racism and social exclusion, as well as by economic and “development” policies which increase poverty” (FIMI, 2006: 14-16). This stance which seeks to establish links between the rights of indigenous peoples, human rights and women’s rights, has been retaken by some female leaders and indigenous organizations (Artúa, 2005; Blackwell, 2006; Olivera, 2000; Sánchez, 2005). The pertinence and importance of this approach may be verified in the analysis that a group of researchers performed on the Acteal Massacre (Hernández *et al.*, 1998).

Well now, the ownership of sexual and reproductive rights, as that of human rights, corresponds to the individuals. This states a possible conflict or dilemma when collective rights precede the individual, as in the case of indigenous communities where the so called “uses and customs” have full validity. We already have studies that analyze the double challenge faced by the associations of indigenous women when they look for the

⁹ In the Second Meeting of the National Coordination of Indigenous Women (*Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas*, CONAMI), held in April 2000 in Chilpancingo, Guerrero, the diverse forms of violence in the lives of women were analyzed; there violations of women’s rights in some zones of Oaxaca and Guerrero, in the shape of forced sterilizations, were denounced (Blackwell, 2006: 135-136).

¹⁰ FIMI was founded on the reunion of Continental Link of Indigenous women organized in Lima, Peru in 1999, and it is integrated by leaders of several Latin American and Mexican ethnics. It participated in ONU Beijing+5 and Beijing+10 conferences, and it “became a network whose aim is to strengthen the organizations of indigenous women, increase their participation and visibility in the international sphere as well as build capabilities” (FIMI, 2006: 7).

transformation of the oppressive aspects of the customs that compromise their dignity (physical violence in the first place, arranged marriages, the exclusion of community government), at the same time they participate in the defense of collective interests of their communities (Artía, 2005; Hernández, 2004; Hernández and Sierra, 2005; Millán, 2006; Speed, 2006).

The way the leaders are resolving the dilemma was clearly and overwhelmingly expressed in the historic intervention of Comandante Esther before the Congress of the Union, on March 18th, 2001. At this opportunity, Esther manifested the challenge of women to the customs that damage their integrity, at the time she defended the claims for the autonomy of Zapatista communities:

We know which uses and customs are good and which bad. Bad are hitting and beating a woman, selling and buying one, a forced marriage without her consent, ban her from taking part of the assembly, not to let her leave her house [...] That is why we want the Law on Rights and Indigenous Culture to be approved [...] It will work for us to be recognized and respected as women and indigenous women, which is what we are [...] This means that we want our way of dressing, speaking, governing, praying, curing, working in collectives, respecting the land and understanding life, which is the nature that we are part of, to be recognized [...] In this law our rights as women are included, since no one can hinder our participation, our dignity and integrity in any job, as it is for men [...] (cited in Hernández and Sierra, 2005: 112-113).

Esther referred to the Agreements of San Andrés Sacamchén/Larráinzar (signed by the representative of the Mexican government and EZLN in February 1996), which contain a section devoted to “the situation, rights and culture of indigenous women” (Zapatista Front of National Liberation, 1999: 29-30), where the human rights of women are specifically recognized according to CEDAW. The issue is how the discursive recognition of women’s rights in quotidian life is translated into the construction of new representation and gender practices, which allow laying the bases for advances in the direction of freer-from-violence actions. This is a topic on which some studies begin to appear (Millán, 2006: 88-95; Stephen, 2006; Zylberberg, 2006), nevertheless due to their complexity and diversity of conditions and regional trajectories require more researches in the future.

Conclusions

Violence against women is a serious problem in Mexico, as it is attested by the results from recent surveys that have recorded very high prevalence both in urban and rural contexts. In previous pages I referred to studies that rural and indigenous women do not passively accept mistreatment; we already have figures that prove that a relatively high percentage resorts to judicial authorities to press charges against violent husbands, in spite of all the obstacles they encounter and that they do not usually receive supportive responses. On the contrary, researches reveal that the authorities in charge of administering justice share with the population, which they serve, gender representations that justify domestic violence when it is exercised for the “correction” of the women who do not fulfill their domestic duties. As in the case of urban contexts, the system is oriented to press women to reach conciliation, even though women’s integrity is at risk.

These representations are part of a gender model that currently is being increasingly challenged, mainly by the actions of organizations which have undertaken the defense of women’s rights. For the complex task they develop in their communities, the organizations are using all the legal and regulatory instruments that recognize that violence against women is not only a source of penance in their lives as it affects their wellbeing and health, but also it is one of the largest obstacles for them to be able to develop all their capabilities and to exercise their right to decide, from the most intimate aspects of their bodies, sexuality and reproduction, to their participation in public life, labor, organizational and governmental spaces. The broad road of demands the local organizations articulate and the activities they carry out are a proof that they have not grasped the globalized discourse of rights, but in the process of adaption to their needs they redefine its meanings. As they do so, they open doors for the possibility to imagine and construct a different gender order, more egalitarian and freer from violence.

Bibliography

- Amnistía Internacional (2008), *La lucha de las mujeres por la seguridad y la justicia. Violencia Familiar en México*, Mexico: Amnesty International.
- Artía, Patricia (2005), “Voces de mujeres: Dos experiencias de participación en la Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas en Oaxaca”, in *Autonomía de las mujeres en contextos rurales*, num. 1, Mexico: El Colegio de México, Serie de Investigaciones del PIEM Género, Cultura y Sociedad.
- Blackwell, Maylei (2006), “Weaving in the Spaces: Indigenous Women’s Organizing and the Politics of Scale in Mexico”, in Speed, Shannon *et al.*, *Dissident Women. Gender and Cultural Politics in Chiapas*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Chenaut, Victoria (2001), “Disputas matrimoniales y cambio social en Coyutla, Veracruz (México)”, in *Boletín Antropológico*, vol. 3, num. 53, Venezuela: Universidad de los Andes.
- De Keijzer, Benno (1998), “La masculinidad como factor de riesgo”, in Tuñón, Esperanza [coord.], *Género y salud en el sureste de México*, Villahermosa: Ecosur and Universidad Autónoma de Tabasco.
- Diario Oficial de la Federación (2007), *Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia*, February 1st, Mexico: Secretariat of Government.
- Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (1999), *Acuerdos sobre derechos y cultura indígena. Mesa 1 de los diálogos de San Andrés Sacamchén*, Mexico: Zapatista Front of National Liberation.
- Foro Internacional de Mujeres Indígenas-FIMI (2006), *Mairin iwanka raya. Mujeres indígenas confrontan la violencia. Informe complementario al estudio sobre violencia contra las mujeres del Secretario General de las Naciones Unidas*, New York: UNIFEM, The Global Fund for Women, Madre, Hivos.
- Freyermuth, Graciela (2004), “La violencia de género como factor de riesgo en la maternidad”, in Torres, Marta [comp.], *Violencia contra las mujeres en contextos urbanos y rurales*, Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- González Montes, Soledad (2006), “Las mujeres y la violencia doméstica en un pueblo del Valle de Toluca (1970-1990)”, in De los Reyes, Aurelio [coord.], *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México, Siglo XX. Campo y ciudad*, tome V, vol. 1, Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, El Colegio de México.

- González Montes, Soledad (2002), “Las mujeres y las relaciones de género en las investigaciones sobre el México campesino e indígena”, in Urrutia, Elena [coord.], *Estudios sobre las mujeres y las relaciones de género en México: aportes desde diversas disciplinas*, Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- González Montes, Soledad (1998), “La violencia doméstica y sus repercusiones para la salud reproductiva en una zona indígena (Cuetzalan, México)”, in *Los silencios de la salud reproductiva: violencia, sexualidad y derechos reproductivos*, Mexico: Asociación Mexicana de Estudios de Población and Mac Arthur Foundation.
- González Montes, Soledad and Pilar Iracheta (2006) [1987], “La violencia en la vida de las mujeres campesinas. El distrito de Tenango, 1880-1910”, in Ramos, Carmen [comp.], *Presencia y transparencia. La mujer en la historia de México*, Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- González Montes, Soledad and Mariana Mojarro (in print), “De la victimización a la agencia: Denuncia de la violencia conyugal por mujeres en ocho regiones indígenas de México”, in Tepichin, Ana María [coord.], *Género y pobreza en México*, Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- Heise, Lori *et al.* (1994), *Violencia contra la mujer: la carga oculta sobre la salud*, Washington: Programa Mujer, Salud y Desarrollo, Pan American Health Organization.
- Hernández, Rosalva Aída [ed.] (1998), *La otra palabra. Mujeres y violencia en Chiapas, antes y después de Acteal*, Mexico: CIESAS/COLEM/CIAM.
- Hernández, Rosalva Aída (2004), “El derecho positivo y la costumbre jurídica: las mujeres indígenas de Chiapas y sus luchas por el acceso a la justicia”, in Torres, Marta [ed.], *Violencia contra las mujeres en contextos urbanos y rurales*, Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- Hernández, Rosalva Aída and María Teresa Sierra (2005), “Repensar los derechos colectivos desde el género: Aportes de las mujeres indígenas al debate de la autonomía”, in Sánchez, Martha [coord.], *La doble mirada. Voces e historias de mujeres indígenas latinoamericanas*, Mexico: UNIFEM/ Instituto de Liderazgo Simone de Beauvoir.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI), Fondo de Desarrollo de las Naciones Unidas para la Mujer (UNIFEM), Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (Inmujeres) (2003), *Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares 2003*. ENDIREH Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Mexico: INEGI, UNIFEM, Inmujeres.

- Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI), Fondo de Desarrollo de las Naciones Unidas para la Mujer (UNIFEM), Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (Inmujeres), Dirección General de Estadística (DGE) (2006), *Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares 2006*, Mexico: INEGI, UNIFEM, Inmujeres, DGE.
- Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública (INSP) (2008), *Encuesta de Salud y Derechos de las Mujeres Indígenas ENSADEMI 2008*, Cuernavaca: INSP.
- Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública (INSP) y Secretaría de Salud (SSA) (2003), *Encuesta Nacional sobre Violencia contra las Mujeres 2003*, Mexico: INSP and SSA.
- Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública (INSP) and Secretaría de Salud (SSA) (2006), *Encuesta Nacional sobre Violencia contra las Mujeres 2006*, Mexico: INSP and SSA.
- Lamas, Marta (2001), “Movimiento feminista y discurso político: Los derechos sexuales y reproductivos en la construcción de una ciudadanía moderna”, in Figueroa, Juan and Claudio Stern [comps.], *Encuentros y desencuentros en la salud reproductiva. Políticas públicas, marcos normativos y actores sociales*, Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- Martínez, Beatriz (2000), *Género, empoderamiento y sustentabilidad. Una experiencia de microempresa artesanal de mujeres indígenas*, Mexico: Grupo Interdisciplinario Sobre Mujer, Trabajo y Pobreza.
- Martínez, Beatriz and Susana Mejía (1997), *Ideología y práctica en delitos cometidos contra mujeres: El sistema judicial y la violencia en una región indígena de Puebla, México*, Puebla: Colegio de Postgraduados.
- Millán, Márgara (2006), “Indigenous Women and Zapatismo: New Horizons of Visibility”, in Speed, Shannon *et al.*, *Dissident Women. Gender and Cultural Politics in Chiapas*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Mejía, Susana *et al.* (2003), “Violencia y justicia hacia la mujer nahua de Cuetzalan”, in Bonfil, Paloma and Elvia Martínez [eds.], *Diagnóstico de la discriminación hacia las mujeres indígenas*, Mexico: Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas.
- Olivera, Mercedes [ed.] (2000), *Memoria del Encuentro Reclamo de las Mujeres Ante la Impunidad y la Guerra en Chiapas. San Cristóbal de las Casas, 25 y 26 de noviembre de 1999*, Mexico: Taller Editorial La Correa Feminista.

- Convergencia, Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, num. 50, 2009, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México
- Ortiz Ortega, Adriana [comp.] (1999), *Derechos reproductivos de las mujeres. Un debate sobre justicia social en México*, Mexico: Edamex, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.
- Ramírez, Juan Carlos (2006), “La violencia de varones contra sus parejas heterosexuales: realidades y desafíos. Un recuento de la producción mexicana”, in *Salud Pública de México*, supplement 2, vol. 48, Cuernavaca: Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública.
- Ramírez, Juan and Graciela Uribe (1993), “Mujer y violencia: un hecho cotidiano”, in *Salud Pública de México*, vol. 35, num. 2, Cuernavaca: Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública.
- Rojas, Olga (2001), *El debate sobre los derechos sexuales en México*, Documentos de Trabajo num. 7, Programa Salud Reproductiva y Sociedad, Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- Sánchez, Martha (2005), “Ser mujer indígena en México: una experiencia personal y colectiva en el movimiento indígena en la última década”, in Sánchez, Martha [coord.], *La doble mirada. Voces e historias de mujeres indígenas latinoamericanas*, Mexico: UNIFEM, Instituto de Liderazgo Simone de Beauvoir.
- Secretaría de Salud (2000), *Norma Oficial Mexicana NOM-190-SSA 1-1999, Prestación de servicios de salud. Criterios para la atención médica de la violencia familiar*, Mexico: Secretariat of Health.
- Sierra, María Teresa (2004), “Derecho indígena y mujeres: viejas costumbres, nuevos derechos”, in Pérez-Gil, Sara and Patricia Ravelo [coords.], *Voces disidentes. Debates contemporáneos en los estudios de género en México*, Mexico: CIESAS, Cámara de Diputados, Porrúa.
- Speed, Shannon (2006), “Rights at the Intersection: Gender and Ethnicity in Neoliberal Mexico”, in Speed, Shannon *et al.*, *Dissident Women. Gender and Cultural Politics in Chiapas*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Stephen, Lynn (2006), “Indigenous women’s activism in Oaxaca and Chiapas”, en Speed, Shannon *et al.*, *Dissident women. Gender and cultural politics in Chiapas*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Stern, Steve (1999), *La historia secreta del género. Mujeres, hombres y poder en México en las postrimerías del periodo colonial*, Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Szasz, Ivonne and Guadalupe Salas (2008), *Sexualidad, derechos humanos y ciudadanía. Diálogos sobre un proyecto en construcción*, Mexico: El Colegio de México.

- Terven, Adriana (in process), *Justicia indígena en tiempos multiculturales. Hacia la conformación de proyectos colectivos propios: la experiencia organizativa de Cuetzalan*, Mexico City, Mexico: doctorate thesis on Social Anthropology, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social.
- Torres, Marta (2004), “Violencia contra las mujeres y derechos humanos: aspectos teóricos y jurídicos”, in Torres, Marta [comp.], *Violencia contra las mujeres en contextos urbanos y rurales*, Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- Valdez, Rosario (2004), “Del silencio privado a las agendas públicas: el devenir de la lucha contra la violencia doméstica en México”, in Torres, Marta [comp.], *Violencia contra las mujeres en contextos urbanos y rurales*, Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- Vallejo, Ivette (2004), “Usos y escenificaciones de la legalidad ante litigios de violencia hacia la mujer maseual en Cuetzalan, Puebla”, in Torres, Marta [comp.], *Violencia contra las mujeres en contextos urbanos y rurales*, Mexico: El Colegio de México.
- Villa, Rufina (2003), “La cultura indígena y los derechos de las mujeres”, in Bonfil, Paloma and Elvia Martínez [comps.], *Diagnóstico de la discriminación hacia las mujeres indígenas*, Mexico: Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas.
- Zylberberg, Violeta (2006), “We can no longer be like hens with our heads bowed, we must raise our heads and look ahead: a consideration of the daily life of Zapatista women”, in Speed, Shannon *et al.*, *Dissident women. Gender and cultural politics in Chiapas*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Soledad González Montes. Doctor in Anthropology from Universidad Complutense de Madrid; she is part of the National System of Researchers. She has researched and published on gender relations in peasant families in the context of agrarian transformations, the connections between violence against women and their reproductive health and women before local courts; she has also written on joyful aspects of peasant culture (dances and festivities). Among her most recent publications one finds: “Conflictive marriage and separation in a rural municipality in Central Mexico, 1970-2000”, in *Decoding gender. Law and practice in contemporary Mexico* (2007); “Challenging custom: domestic violence and women’s struggles for sexual and reproductive rights in a Mexican Indian region”, in *Sexuality, Research and Social Policy* (2007), and “Anne MacKaye Chapman. Testimonios y exploraciones”, in *Etnografía de los confines*. Andanzas de Anne Chapman (2007).

Sent to dictum: October 23rd, 2008

Approval: November 17th, 2008