

Constructing New Meanings through Traditional Values : Feminism and the Promotion of Women's Rights in the Mexican Zapatista Movement

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I. Introduction

When I was in Chile, I had a chance to participate in a seminar on issues of indigenous movements. At the seminar, many indigenous activists, including Western activists, came together to discuss cultural diversity and sustainable development. At one point during the day, one of the indigenous leaders asked a German activist if she was a feminist. The strength of her denial surprised me. For me, such a strong negative reaction to the idea of being a feminist seemed odd for an activist like her who was working to promote cultural diversity. Later, I asked this woman why she had so strongly denied being a feminist. She replied that being a feminist had a stigma in indigenous communities. Being a feminist sounded like being an

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advocate of colonialist Western ideas that destroyed the traditional culture of indigenous peoples.

As a person who understands feminist movements as just one of many social movements aimed at protecting the rights of minorities and changing social structure, this incident propelled me to ask some questions about feminism as a social movement: In any country but especially in the Third World, how important is it whether the ideas in a feminist movement are native or foreign? What is the essence of being feminist in the Third World? Are such feminists really just sowing the seeds of Western ideology in the Third World?

This paper is an attempt to answer these questions through understanding of feminism as a social movement in the Third World, where patriarchic traditions and customs still dominate as they do in the rest of the world. To do this, I look at the Zapatista movement in Mexico and its advocacy of women's rights in indigenous communities.

In 1994, when the Mexican government proclaimed that Mexico was not a Third World country anymore, the *Ejército Zapatista para Liberalización Nacional* (Zapatista Army for National Liberation: EZLN) rose up declaring that they would fight against repression and injustice suffered by Mexican society in general and, more specifically, by Mexican indigenous peoples. In addition, their continuous emphasis on the protection of culture and values of Mexican indigenous communities allow many scholars to identify Zapatista movement as a cultural movement. Their demand for autonomy is directly related to their desire to protect indigenous culture and value system.

However, one aspect of their movement that has caught attention both inside and outside of the Mexican indigenous communities is their emphasis on women's right and participation of indigenous women in the movement. For many, such goals are not supposed to be a part of the "traditional" culture or values of the Mexican indigenous communities. Reports indicate that, due to particularly strong patriarchy in the indigenous communities, more than half of the Mexican indigenous women are illiterate compared to one third of indigenous men. Only 8.2 percent of indigenous women ever

reach high school, and nearly half of the indigenous women in Chiapas are malnourished(La Botz 1995).

Contrary to this gloomy statistics, the Zapatista movement is famous for having many female militants among their ranks and for treating them equal to the other male members. Not only has the Zapatista movement developed an egalitarian culture between men and women for their own organization, it also promulgated the “Women’s Revolutionary Law.” This law gives equal rights to women both in society and in the Zapatista Army, recognizing women’s right to choose their own partners and to determine the number of children they would have(La Botz 1995). The egalitarian culture between men and women represented through the Women’s Revolutionary Law demonstrates that the Zapatista movement has developed a unique culture that seems to be distinct from the original culture of its own members.

In this article, I explore how the Women’s Revolutionary Law has been proposed by the Zapatista organization and accepted by Mexican indigenous communities. I analyze the ideas of the Women’s Revolutionary Law in terms of its being an attempt of feminist movement within the larger Zapatista movement to challenge existing patriarchal aspects of Mexican society. By doing so I attempt to elucidate an alternative way to understand feminist movements in Third World countries, where it is commonly believed that egalitarianism between men and women is not a part of their traditional cultures.

Feminist ideas may or may not be foreign to the traditional culture of a Third World country. Actually the whole debate on postcolonial feminism emerged as a serious challenge toward the notion that feminist ideas are universal or Western(Jayawardena 1995). However, I argue that perceiving feminism as either intrinsically Western or universal has serious limitations in analyzing the complex nature of feminism as a movement. In action, feminist ideas constantly transform itself and it is crucial to comprehend the process of such transformation. Therefore, the focus of this paper is not whether particular feminist ideas are “new” or “old” to a traditional culture

but how these ideas, regardless of whether they are new or old, have been interpreted or transformed within a society.

The remainder of this paper consists of three parts. In the first part, I briefly examine a conventional way of looking at social movements and feminist movements - frame analysis- and point out its limitations. Then I explore meaning construction theory as an alternative that overcomes the limitations of frame analysis. In the second part, I show the interpretation process of the 'new' culture of equal rights for women in Mexican indigenous communities, which was triggered by debates regarding Women's Revolutionary Law proposed by EZLN. This process involves not only the participants of the Zapatista movement but also members of indigenous communities in general. To do so, I used content analysis of EZLN's declarations, interviews of both movement leaders and participants published in Mexican journals, and newspaper articles on EZLN's general meetings. The third part concludes the paper with a summary of my argument.

II. Analyzing Feminism as a Social Movement

II.1. Frame Analysis

Social movements involve collective actions to challenge various aspects of society. Individuals come together at a certain historical moment to change the structure of society through social movements (Buechler and Cylke 1997). In other words, social movements tend to promulgate new ideas and aim at implementing these ideas not only within their own organizations but also in the existing structure of society. From where, then, do these new values and ideas emerge? Or how do these new ideas and values become a solid basis for mobilizing people, who have lived, maybe, their entire lives under the existing structure?

The answers to these questions regarding social movement in the Third World used to heavily rely on the thesis that a movement's strong and

educated leadership introduced these ideas to motivate and galvanize people's grievance. Therefore, the analyses of social movements have been highly focused upon on leadership and its capacity to effectively mobilize people. And this approach can be understood in the line of frame analysis, which believes new ideas or values are brought into the movement by its organizers as a tool to approach people at the grassroots as well as to challenge the existing social structure. According to frame analysis, the new ideas could be modified or "aligned" by the leadership in order to more effectively reach the masses.

Moreover, in frame analysis, culture is seen as a practice and as a sphere of practical activity. Therefore culture is not a coherent system of symbols and meanings but a series of "tools" that are means for the performance of actions (Swell 1999, 46). In other words, frame analysis perceives culture as a collection of different meanings and symbols which do not necessarily have interactions or ties to each other. Not defining culture as a coherent system, frame analysts tend to understand a specific idea and discourse developed by a social movement as a tool and this is why we can categorize frame analysis within the toolkit approach to culture. According to Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford (1986, 211), the term "frame" is a "schemata of interpretation" that individuals use "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" occurrences within their life and world. Through frames, individuals or collective entities find events meaningful and organize experiences.

In frame analysis, "new" values or ideas that a social movement organization carries is a frame that should be aligned by the leadership or the social movement organization to reach out to the potential participants and to mobilize their participation. In other words, a new culture or cultural idea of a certain social movement derives from the movement's leadership or its organization. Therefore, frame alignment becomes an indispensable condition, which means "the linkage or conjunction of individual and social movement organization interpretive frameworks" (Snow et al. 1986, 212). Exploring the success of social movement organizations in terms of frame alignment involves analyzing a social movement organization's capacity "to

skillfully effect and then sustain a particular type of alignment”(Snow et al. 1986, 222). The relationship between the new culture of the social movement organization and the grassroots is one-sided. New values come, top-down, from the movement to the grassroots and any modification is mainly done by the movement organization rather than through a process of negotiation or mutual interpretation between movement organizations and the masses. This perspective continues to be widely applied to the analysis of social movements in the Third World.

A good example of how frame analysis has been used in the Third World context is Skidmore and Smith’s 1997 analysis of the Cuban revolutionary movements. They argue that the revolutionary ideas for the Cuban guerilla movements were implemented mainly by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Raul Castro, who were middle class and educated in a privileged university in Latin America. They also state that the leadership of the movement tactically used the grievances of the peasants to achieve a revolution in Cuba saying

[t]hey (Castro and the leadership of the guerilla movement) found the peasant forced to scratch for a miserable living. The rebels took a strong interest in their people’s fate because they needed peasant support to survive in the mountains. It was the first principle of the guerilla: retain the sympathy of the local residents, not only for supplies but also so they will not betray you to the authorities(Skidmore & Smith 1997, 274).

As we know, one of leaders of the Cuban revolutionary force, Che Guevara, tried the same strategy in Bolivia but without success. This example then brings the question of why the same “frame” and the same “alignment process” with the same leadership resulted in different implementation and consequences.

Frame analysis cannot effectively answer these questions due to its limitation. That is, frame analysis fails to address the impact of already existing cultural models on the emergence of new cultural ideas and goals. By emphasizing the capacity of the organization or the leadership of an

organization to bring new ideas, frame analysis does not recognize varying reactions from the people who are rooted in their own cultural structure, which may be alien to the new ideas that leaders try to implement. As such, the process of accepting or rejecting new ideas or a “frame” cannot be explained by merely looking at it as an alignment process by the leadership of an organization.

This limitation of frame analysis becomes even more evident when we look at feminist movements in the Third World. Often times, local activists accuse feminist ideas of having been implemented by colonialism or by dominant countries. The feminist ideas of the Zapatista movement in Mexico are not an exception. Mexican indigenous culture and its traditional values are said to be highly patriarchal and far from egalitarian. Accordingly, there are those who believe that the feminist ideas of the Zapatista movement are mainly the implementation of new Western ideas by the movement’s educated leaders. For them, the active promotion of women’s right in the Zapatista movement is an implementation of “new” values by its “educated” activists only to mobilize support from women in Chiapas (Belausteguigoitia 1996). In the same line of critique, Belausteguigoitia points out that there has not been any real “representation and participation of indigenous women in the movement” (Belausteguigoitia 1996, 417), because Zapatista leaders used the terminology of equal rights for women only to achieve support from Mexican civil society outside of indigenous communities. According to her, indigenous women in the movements were manipulated and used by the leadership without having any opportunity of real participation.

In reality, this critique ignores the wide success by the same movement to bring a new form of feminist ideas both to the Zapatista movement and to Mexican indigenous communities. Contrary to Belausteguigoitia’s arguments, this study shows that “modification” or “alignment” of the original feminist proposal was done through a process of constant negotiation and interpretation of those ideas in the context of the existing grassroots’ cultural model. During this process, a more individualistic approach to the women’s rights has been modified into a more collective

approach to women's rights. By accepting communities' interpretation of the proposed ideas, the Zapatista movement achieved broader success in opening a feminist space within the movement and brought unexpected success in increasing participation from the women in indigenous communities (Palomo et al. 1997).

This shows that a frame analysis approach has shortcomings in understanding the role of agency in the movement, because it ignores the autonomy of cultural structures and considers it something that can be created or molded by a few leaders or actors and imposed on the whole movement. Without considering the structural logic of cultural models and how people interpret those models, frame analysts often misinterpret cultural causality in social movements and misunderstand the outcomes.

II.2. Meaning Construction Theory

To overcome the problems of using a frame analysis approach to feminist movement in Zapatista movement, I use meaning construction theory, which explains the emergence of 'new' ideas and ideology in social movements from a cultural perspective. According to meaning construction theory, culture is a system of symbols and meanings and "meaning is predicated on the metaphoric nature of symbols and the patterned relationship of symbols in cultural models" (Kane 1997, 258). Therefore the emergence of new meaning should be examined in terms of a process of meaning construction whereby people "individually and collectively interpret and rearrange symbols and meanings in the process of acting on those meanings in a world of structural conditions and contingent events" (Kane 1997, 259). This theoretical approach also argues that

[m]eaning construction -- and thus, formulation of movement ideology, goals, and strategies -- does not just happen "at the top" and then gets handed down, *fait accompli*, to masses that unquestioningly embrace and internalize it. Rather, because of the metaphoric nature of symbols and the essential mechanism of interpretation, meaning construction is a multipath process

between movement leaders and participants(Kane 1997, 254-255).

Including the importance of the structural logic of cultural models and people's interpretation of those models in the analysis of meaning construction opens up the possibility of conversation between the leadership's ideas and people's cultural models. Furthermore, the masses are transformed from passive followers of a leadership's ideology into active agents participating in meaning construction process. And this new approach to the process of meaning construction enables us to explain cultural causality in social movements and to analyze the outcomes adequately. Therefore, meaning construction theory offers a way to understand the multifaceted process by which the Zapatista movement organization and the indigenous communities adapted so-called foreign ideas and modified them to construct new "local" meanings. In the following section, I turn to the empirical analysis of the Zapatista movement based on meaning construction theory.

III. The Process of Meaning Construction in the Zapatista movement.

This article now returns to the original research question of how the 'new' idea or values of promoting women's right emerged and was implemented in the Zapatista movement. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to look at the existing culture -Mayan culture- and the structural conditions of indigenous peoples in Chiapas. Understanding the existing culture and structural conditions enables us to explore the foundations that indigenous people use to interpret the 'new' ideas introduced by the Zapatista movement. Then, I look at the agenda of the Zapatista movement related to women's rights by examining transcripts from various conferences and meetings where participants of the movement were interviewed about women's rights.

III.1. Women in Traditional Mayan Culture

After a detailed anthropological research in San Pedro Chenalhó, Chiapas, where many indigenous communities support Zapatista movements, Eber(1999) maintains that neither stereotypes of total oppression nor harmonic complementation correctly explains the cultural and structural conditions of indigenous women in Chiapas. According to Eber, Mayan culture has a tradition of complementation between gender roles, whereby each gender is distinct but not necessarily disparate in status. She also argues that it is the advent of modernization, following economic crisis, which broke the complementary tie between genders and gave birth to increasing gender inequality.

Faust(1998) agrees to Eber on the complementary nature of Mayan culture's gender roles. According to her, in Mayan culture, the roles of women and men, even though generally well-defined, were easily reversed or shared during emergencies in order to assure the necessary function of productive and maintenance activities. And this flexibility contributed to creative forms of resistance to colonial domination and continues to facilitate the adaptation of gender roles to changing structural conditions. In Mayan tradition, women's role was to manage the local environment and use local resources. Women cared for small animals, tended fruit trees, and grew herbs for cooking and medicine. They also cooked, washed clothes, and cleaned the house. Men hunted, made swidden fields in the forest, constructed and maintained houses. However, women and men also learned enough of each other's roles to be able to assist a spouse when needed or even to substitute when the spouse was absent or disabled.

Eber's study also points out that the traditional Mayan culture not only had gender complementation as a basis of its society but also welcomed women's participation in social life. Women in highland Chiapas were involved in meaningful roles that brought them self-esteem and social power outside of their households - as midwives, shamans, weavers of festival garments, and leaders of fiestas and cooperatives. Women call these roles *cargos*; services that they provide to their communities without pay and that they were often called to perform in a dream. And from their

positions in both their communities and households, indigenous women continually adapted traditional ideas of respect, service, and complementarity to meet their own and their society's changing needs and ideals. However, this complementary gender culture has changed significantly due to modernization and increasing integration of indigenous communities into the capitalist system.

III.2. Modern Structural Conditions in Chiapas

Even though Chiapas is known for its rich natural resources, Chiapas is also well known for its poverty and inequality which are a heritage from the colonial period (Burbach 1994). Furthermore, the capitalist development projects spearheaded by the Mexican government deepened the problems in Chiapas. In the 1970s, with an oil boom, the Mexican government built huge dams in Chiapas and began exploration for petroleum. These two projects brought drastic growth of non-agricultural work. As a result, indigenous people with a small plot of land or people who were expelled from their land became more and more dependent on non-agricultural and non-traditional works. Increasing integration of indigenous communities into a cash-based capitalist culture broke the equilibrium between the traditional roles of women and men. The importance of men's work became more visible because such work is the only stable source for cash. Since men needed to work outside of the community to support their family, farming was added to women's workload (Collier 1994).

However in the 1970s, problems of this change were less visible because the Mexican government subsidized fertilizers to indigenous communities to increase productivity, and it made farming easier and, more productive (Cancian and Brown 1994). The problem turned out to be evident with the economic crisis in 1982. International organizations such as the IMF and World Bank imposed economic restructuring, which included the withdrawal of the state intervention. The state withdrawal meant the eventual removal of fertilizer subsidies to the indigenous communities. In addition to the drastic removal of state subsidies, Chiapas experienced economic recession, because most important construction projects ended

and no more governmental projects were initiated due to the debt crisis. Therefore, those who sold their small plot of land, relying on waged labor instead, became unemployed and the unemployment rate rapidly augmented (Hernandez 1994). Increase in unemployment caused more domestic violence and alcoholism in indigenous communities. And increasing migration to other parts of Mexico or to other countries produced a large number of female-headed households, which increased women's economic participation as well as their workload (Collier 1994).

Grievances among indigenous peoples were deepened as well as grievances among indigenous women increased. However, before the Zapatista uprising, women tended to contextualize their difficulties within the suffering that their kinsmen endured in the normal course of the lives. Until recently, women may have said that they suffered differently from men, but they rarely argued that women suffered more than men. Even today, when describing abuses, women tend to focus on those related to poverty and racism that affect their whole communities such as the lack of health clinics in their communities or social assistance in times of need rather than expressing difficulties that women experience due to gender discrimination in the communities.

III.3. Promotion of Equal Rights for Women: The Process of Meaning Construction

In 1994, the EZLN rose up demanding governmental autonomy to protect their own culture and to promote development in their own way. At the same time, the Zapatista movement strongly emphasized promoting women's right and increasing political participation of indigenous women, which has not been seen as "traditional" culture of the Mexican indigenous community. Nonetheless, as a result of the movement's women's rights campaign, 55% of the support basis for the movement consists of women and 33% of its soldiers are women (Gutiérrez 1996). Not only have they promoted egalitarianism between men and women within their own organization, the Zapatista movement promulgated the Women's Revolutionary Law, which grants equal rights for women including

recognizing women's rights to political participation, to live without sexual and domestic violence, to choose their own partners, and to decide the number of children that they want to have (La Botz 1995). The Women's Revolutionary Law was proposed by the *Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena* (The Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee) in 1993. In the meeting, leaders of women's organizations proposed the law declaring the following:

First, Women, no matter what race, belief, color or political affiliation have rights to participate in the revolutionary struggle in the place and degree that their will and capacity determine.

Second, Women have rights to work and to receive fair pay.

Third, Women have the right to decide the number of children to have and raise.

Forth, Women have rights to participate in community issues and have positions if they were elected freely and democratically.

Fifth, Women and their children have the right to primary health care and food.

Sixth, Women have the right to education.

Seventh, Women have the right to select their partner and not be forced into marriage.

Eighth, Any woman should not be beaten or abused physically neither by her family nor by strangers. The crime of sexual violation or attempted violation will be punished severely.

Ninth, Women can have directorial positions in any organizations and can have military positions in the Revolutionary Armed Forces.

Tenth, Women will have all the right and obligations that revolutionary laws and regulations would indicate. (EZLN 1993, translated to English by the author)

This law was largely welcomed by female participants of the movement. The following excerpt from an interview with Lieutenant Susana illustrates the point:

We want that nobody forces us to marry whom we do not want to marry.

We want to have as many as children that we love and we can take care.

We want rights to have cargo in community.

We want right to express our opinions and those opinions to be respected.

We want right to education and even we want to be a driver!

(Gutiérrez 1996, Interview with Susana in 1993 translated to English by the author).

Although women's political participation and equal rights became one of the important goals of the Zapatista movement, various sectors of the movement certainly expressed disagreement with the content of the equal rights for women proposed by the committee. The law had to face serious questions from the male members of the committee despite the fact that the law passed unanimously. However, more severe criticism came later from the masses, especially on the issues of the right to choose one's partner and to decide the number of children, which includes the right to abortion.

As I mentioned before, because of Mayan cultural model of gender roles, which has complementary understanding of gender roles and women's political participation, there has not been serious problem in embracing the idea of women's participation in political, economic and social spheres. The indigenous communities interpreted women's participation within their traditional cultural model and defined it as participation for collective rights not for individual rights. The following remarks from a movement leader clearly show the point:

Yes, we participated in the first of January (Zapatista Uprising)... the women's struggle is the struggle of everybody. In EZLN, we do not fight for our own interests but struggle against every situation that exists in Mexico; against all the injustice, all the marginalization, all the poverty, and all the exploitation that Mexican women suffer. Our struggle in EZLN is not for women

in Chiapas but for all the Mexicans.(Gutiérrez 1996, Interview with Ana Maria in 1993 translated to English by the author)

The leaders of the movement as well as participants in the movement shared the same meaning of women's participation. For them, participation is for the collective interests of indigenous communities and, through participation, women become equally responsible members of their community. Furthermore, women's rights were seen by both members of the movement and the indigenous communities more as collective economic and social rights than as individual rights for choice.

Men in the community talked about EZLN and then women wanted to know. Later we realized that the rich have a lot of money without working hard and we work really hard but are dying from hunger and illness. We do not know even Spanish to defend ourselves. I would like to tell the women in other places that we need to organize to protect ourselves from injustice (Gutiérrez 1996, Interview with Alicia in 1994 translated to English by the author).

When I heard about Zapatista uprising, I was afraid. But I was also excited because some indigenous people just like me made us heard. And I began to participate in Zapatista support base(Gutiérrez 1996, Interview with Antonia in 1994 translated to English by the author).

However, the individualistic rights of women such as right to choose their partners and to decide the number of children they have faced great resistance from the masses. Even some indigenous women's organizations criticized these rights as a product of manipulation of *mestizo*¹⁾ women(Hernández C. & Ortiz 1996). Indigenous women's organizations

¹⁾ *Mestizo* means in Spanish a person of mixed Spanish and Indian parentage. However, due to the fact that it emerged as a discourse of nation formation [...] as a discourse of social control, official *meztisaje* is constructed implicitly against a peripheral, marginalized, dehumanized Indian "Other" who is often "disappeared" process. (Cf. Mallon 1996)

met in September, 1994 in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas to discuss the Women's rights in their customs and traditions. There, these indigenous women's organizations argued the need for protection of collective rights for cultural difference saying that

Not every one of our traditions are the same: two different communities have different traditions. Our ancestors left these traditions to us, and we cannot give them up. We do not want to lose our mother tongue. We believe that we are indigenous, and we think different from those who speak Spanish(Taller 1994, declaration translated by the author).

While denouncing the Women's Revolutionary Law as a product of *mestizo* women's ideas, these organizations also expressed their support for the promotion of women's participation in community activities and women's right for land entitlement. Also they clearly opposed the spousal rape and the trade of women among communities saying

Violence, rape, and beatings are not good. These are customs of the past, and we need to change them. We think it is unfair that we cannot have land under our tradition, and we think we need to change it, too. We do not want our community to disrespect us. We do not want men to dominate us. But we do want neither to change our tradition nor to become different(Taller 1994, declaration translated by the author).

The opposition to violence and inequality signals that the individualistic understanding of women's right has transformed into more collectivist understanding of women's rights with the interpretation process of the Zapatista's proposals. In other words, the masses approached women's rights as the right to be a member of community with equal rights without threat of rape or abuse by other members of the community. Therefore, it demonstrates that, in the process of interpreting individualistic ideas of women's right, members of the movement used their own culture as a reference point. As a result, the notion of women's rights, which were seen

as very individualistic, or Western, evolved into being a more collectivist form of women's right focusing on bettering their community through improving gender relations.

The same process went on in the communities. Members of communities did not accept what were seen as "radical" ideas of women's rights. According to Eber(1999), the supporters or participants of the Zapatista movement are not much interested in abortion rights or the right to choose one's own partner. They express much more interest in women's opportunity for education and for organizing collectives to alleviate their economic hardship. Most participants of the movements understand the equal rights of women in terms of participation in community activities and elimination of violence(Eber 1999). Their indifference to the issue of abortion rights can be better understood in terms of the indigenous collective culture of child rearing. Since the whole community is supposed to share the responsibility of child rearing and traditional extended family structure has been maintained, having a child is not that much of a problem for the women. The problem for indigenous women is how to feed the children in a more economically and socially egalitarian culture.

In turn, this interpretation of "women's right" in terms of collective goods and economic improvement certainly influenced the Zapatista movement leaders, and they changed their focus from "individual" women's rights to "collective" women's rights with more emphasis on traditional indigenous values. They became very cautious about promoting abortion rights and freedom of choice of a partner. However, they actively promoted collective programs and equal rights to land entitlement and education. The following quote from an interview with Commander Ramona of EZLN shows us this change in the notion of women's right in the leadership of the movement.

Ramona, you went to communities and talked with women. Did you discuss abortion?

No, no. It did not happen, because there is belief in the indigenous communities that we cannot allow abortions.

However, there are women who die from illegal abortion practices.

Yes, I know. But we need to respect the tradition of each community. We believe that indigenous women should have access to good health services, and we believe that women should choose abortion if they want. But each community has their way of respecting women's rights, and we cannot impose our view on each community and women in the communities (Pérez & Castellano 1995, Interview with Ramona translated by author).

In this interview, it is clear that the leaders of the Zapatista movement do not focus on individualistic women's rights as much as were explicitly laid out in the Women's Revolutionary Law, where the rights for women to choose their own partners and the number of children they had was the third in their list of important issues. Rather, movement leaders now interpret women's rights as a collective right of the community and try to find a way not to confront each community's autonomous decisions on women's issues without totally giving up the idea of freedom of choice.

Due to this change in interpretation of women's rights among the movement's leaders, some feminists criticized the Zapatista movement. Belausteguigoitia is a good example of frustrated feminists in Mexico. According to her, the Zapatista movement used feminism to mobilize support from indigenous women but did not really improve their rights.

Even though there are severe criticisms of the Zapatista's "moderate" approach to women's rights and their interpretation of these rights, there is no sign of change in their approach. As we can see in the process of meaning construction, this collective approach to women's right did not prevail because powerful leaders in the movement initially supported this approach. The leaders of the movement originally proposed a more radical and individualistic set of rights but had to encounter a different interpretation of women's right from the communities, which caused the leaders to alter their perspective. Communities and rank-and-file members of the movement read women's right as an issue of collective rights based

on their own cultural models. Therefore, contrary to Belausteguigoitia's argument that the leaders of the movement used feminism to reach the masses and then opted to modify their view due to lack of commitment to gender equality, this "moderate" stance on women's rights was created in the process of meaning construction through various interpretation and negotiations among communities, indigenous women, and leaders of Zapatista movements. Both the leaders and the masses are creators of the resulting approach to women's rights.

IV. Conclusion

The transformation of the Zapatista movement's definition of women's rights shows limitations of frame analysis and its one-sided approach to social movements. If we understand women's rights as a frame that the leadership of the organization set, it is quite difficult to see the active feedback from the masses or to analyze interactions between leadership's notions of women's right and the masses' notion of women's right. The new meaning of women's rights has in turn challenged both the masses' understanding and that of the leadership. It is true that, as frame analysis may argue, women at the grassroots level were challenged by the leadership to transform their grievances caused by economic hardship into a struggle for women's rights. But it is also true that, as meaning construction theorists may add, the leadership faced a different interpretation of women's right from the masses and thusly had to modify its own notion of women's rights.

Meaning construction theory elucidates how unexpected outcomes –new meanings of women's rights– emerged. Following the process in which these unexpected outcomes emerged, this article illustrates that the new goals and ideology of the movement emerged as a transformation of earlier ideas. Once the agenda to promote women's rights became a reality in the Women's Revolutionary Law, the grassroots interpreted every detail of the agenda reflecting their own cultural model. The unexpected outcome of this cultural interaction between the leadership and the masses evidences that

the most important issue is not whether feminism is foreign or indigenous to a particular culture in the Third World. The crucial issue is how any ideas that challenge any patriarchic social structure is transformed and cultivated by a rich interpretation process to become “new” ideas in every moment of the cultural process.

Abstract

이 논문은 멕시코 원주민 사회 내에서 여성 권익 신장을 위하여 제정된 혁명적 여성법(La Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres: Women's Revolutionary Law)이 사파티스타 민족해방군에 의해 추진된 과정과 이 법안이 멕시코 원주민 공동체들에 의해 받아들여지는 과정을 고찰함으로써 제3세계 여성주의 운동을 심층적으로 이해하는 데 기여하는 것을 그 목적으로 한다. 여성주의 혹은 페미니즘은 제3세계에서 흔히 전통적인 가치와 문화에 반하는 혹은 도전하는 서구적인 사고방식의 전파로 여겨져 왔다. 필자는 이 논문을 통해 어떻게 여성주의적 가치와 사고체계가 제3세계의 문화체계 속에서 해석되고 변화하는가를 고찰하고자 하였다. 즉 여성주의의 가치란 여성주의 운동이 사회운동의 한 갈래로서 추구하는 목표라는 인식하에, 사회운동이론 중 사회적 구성주의 이론의 분석틀을 이용하여 멕시코 사파티스타 민족해방군이 추진한 혁명적 여성법의 탄생과 제정 절차에서의 나타난 담론들을 분석하였다. 본 논문은 이러한 담론의 분석을 통해 혁명적 여성법이 사파티스타 조직들과 원주민 공동체들 간의 여성주의를 어떻게 볼 것인가에 대한 끊임없는 해석과 의미형성의 과정을 통해 생겨난 사파티스타 동체 나름의 독특한 여성주의의 가치를 의미한다고 주장한다. 즉 여성주의적 가치들은 정체적인 것 혹은 불변하는 보편적인(universal) 것이 아니라 이해 당사자들 즉 운동체와 운동원들의 해석과 협상 속에서 다양한 의미형성의 과정을 겪어 만들어지는 끊임없이 변화하는 특수한 문화현상으로 이해되어야 한다는 것이다.

Key Words: Women's Revolutionary Law, Feminism, Social Movements, Zapatista Army of National Liberation, Mexico/ 혁명적 여성법, 여성주의, 사회운동, 사파티스타 민족해방군, 멕시코

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