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## Mothering for Neoliberal Times. Mazahua Women, Poverty and the Cultural Politics of Development in Central Mexico

*Abstract:* This paper presents the results of fieldwork concerning local development programmes addressed to poor Indian women and the social changes they effect in the marginalised Mazahua communities in central Mexico conducted from 2011 to 2015. By analysing the operation of a women’s cooperative I show how neoliberal ideology, which is at the core of development schemes, incorporates both the feminist ideas of gender equality and empowerment of women, and the Mexican tradition of politicising maternity in a crisis to establish new social hierarchies, subjectivities, and power relations, promote individualistic attitudes and a new, “market-oriented” morality, and reinforce political clientelism, leading to profound and usually detrimental (for women and local gender relations) changes in the functioning of native communities.

*Keywords:* development, poverty, mothering, Mazahua, Mexico.

In a statement delivered a couple of days before May 10 (Mother’s Day) one of Mexico’s most important national holidays, the Secretary of Social Development Rosario Robles said that the federal human development programme (*desarrollo humano*) called “Opportunities” (*Oportunidades*) will no longer support Indian families with more than three children. The Mexican politician announced this policy shift on April 30, 2014 (Children’s Day) at a meeting with native communities in the state of Nayarit. She admonished the attending women from indigenous groups living in extreme social exclusion, poverty and under threat of hunger that they should be thinking about the future of their children and control their procreation, following the old (neo)Malthusian motto that “a small family leads a better life.”<sup>1</sup> She invited them to take part in workshops on family planning offered as part of the programme. This statement of Robles, who is considered a feminist and until recently was the leader of the left-leaning PRD (*Partido de Revolución Democrática*), famous for, among other things, her fight for the reproductive rights of Mexican women while she had been serving as the Head of Government of the Federal District,<sup>2</sup> caused public outrage. She was accused of violating the constitutional principle of equality

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<sup>1</sup> Robles participated in the swearing-in of the local community committee appointed to supervise the implementation of a new government programme aimed at reducing hunger (*la Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre*), see: <http://www.sedesol.gob.mx/es/SEDESOL/TodoSobrelaCruzada>

<sup>2</sup> The so-called Robles Law (*Ley Robles*)—draft act to liberalise abortion law in the Federal District (termination of pregnancy would be allowed in cases of rape or if the mother’s life was at risk), proposed in 2000 by Robles who was then head of local government; abortion on demand during the first trimester was made legal in the Federal District in 2007.

before the law, of discrimination based on the ethnicity of the programme's beneficiaries, as well as of ignorance. Interestingly, in the mainstream media outlets, even the most progressive ones, such as the *Proceso* monthly, the criticism of the attitude presented by the liberal woman politician, an educated Mestizo from the urban middle class, was juxtaposed with reports of "unhappy childhood" of kids in poor families.<sup>3</sup> Figures and statistics were mentioned in absence of even a superficial reflection on the structural causes of poverty (especially the feminisation of poverty) and social exclusion, including extreme poverty and deprivation, which is the reality of most indigenous communities in Mexico. Despite decades of struggle for the rights of women and indigenous peoples, the poorest Mexican women are still charged with the responsibility for "appropriate" reproduction of ethnic groups, and, by extension, the nation, in the biological, social, and cultural sense (Cf. Yulval-Davis 1997). The discourse of human rights and the deeply-rooted multiculturalism of Mexican politics have created the local variety of political correctness that render explicitly eugenic elements in social policy no longer acceptable. These elements have been replaced by neoliberal insistence on individual responsibility of mothers for the fate of their families, responsibility of Indian women for the wellbeing of ethnic groups, pressure exerted through national policy based on feminist calls for the liberation and empowerment of women, implemented by governmental institutions, including those established specifically for the promotion of women, such as *Instituto Nacional de la Mujer* (InMUJER 2000).

In this paper I examine the current neoliberal version of political maternalism that constitutes the core for the state's social policy effected through the so-called assistance and development programmes targeting women of the Mazahua indigenous communities (the State of Mexico). Ethnography of a local women's cooperative, the *Pjoxte* Association provides an insight into the specifics of developmental programs in the microscale. It shows the way the system of aiding the poor and efforts to stimulate local development steer the transformation of women's social roles, mothering and community functioning, how those changes are viewed by the Indian women themselves and how they express their resistance to the imposition of behaviour models and the direction of developmental efforts in the region. I have collected the material for my analysis during field research in the Mazahua region in the years 2011–12<sup>4</sup> and 2014–15; some of my arguments are also based on previous studies of the cultural politics of mothering in *colonias populares*<sup>5</sup> of the Mexico City (Hryciuk 2009b, 2010).

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<sup>3</sup> According to the report titled "Poverty and social rights of children and adolescents in Mexico 2010–2012" drawn up by UNICEF and the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development (CONEVAL), currently 21.2 million children and adolescents in Mexico live in poverty, 4.7 million of whom in extreme poverty. Indian children account for 78.5% of poor children, and 33.4% of those living in extreme poverty. [http://www.unicef.org/mexico/spanish/UN\\_BriefPobreza\\_web.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/mexico/spanish/UN_BriefPobreza_web.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Fieldwork conducted as part of interdisciplinary project titled: "Socio-political changes in the indigenous regions of Mexico and their perception by the local population. The case of the Mazahua Region in the State of Mexico," led by Jerzy Makowski (Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, University of Warsaw) financed by the State Committee for Scientific Research.

<sup>5</sup> The term *colonia popular* in Mexico refers to an administrative area called a "colonia" (part of a city district), inhabited by the lower middle and lower class.

### Gendered Development in Mexico

Beginning in the 1970s, the so called “women question” expressed in the slogan “Women are Key to Effective Development” is a constant presence in modernization strategies of multiple countries, development practices of international agencies, and in academic discussions on development programmes (Momsen 2010).

In Mexico, national modernization programmes for women, implemented systematically since the 1970s have been operating both in rural and urban areas (mostly *colonias populares*). Their aims were twofold: to limit the population growth by promoting family planning (mostly through the use of contraception, but also by mandatory sterilization) and to integrate Mexican women into the national economy by stimulating the employment of women in cities and encouraging women (Mestizos and Indians) living in rural areas to take part in a variety of production programmes meant to change local models of production and consumption. (Villareal 1996; McClenaghan 1997; Zapata Martelo et al. 2003, Chant 2003). In the decades that followed, men started to be included in the development efforts originally addressed exclusively to women; gender equality (*equidad de género*) was promoted and emphasis was put on the importance and empowerment of women (*empoderamiento*). Widening the spectrum of activities based on the equality discourse was meant to reconstruct gender relations so as to maximise productivity and effectiveness of implemented programmes (Cf. Chant, Guttmann 2000; Zapata Martelo, Flores Hernández 2003; Benería 2003).<sup>6</sup>

The agenda of development programs was subject to change, adapted to current political and economic needs and goals of Mexican administration, as well as international organizations, UN recommendations, conditions on financial aid imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. And so, for example, in rural areas such as the state of Michoacán plagued by mass emigration to USA, the introduction of production development programmes targeting women (Mestizo and Indian) in the 1970s was meant to draw attention away from the political mobilization of peasants, channel social discontent, and, ultimately, lead to the co-optation of large sectors of the local population within the framework of government programmes (Villareal 1996).

In the decades that followed, during the era of structural adjustment programmes (1980–94)<sup>7</sup> with the resulting privatisation of multiple areas of social life, rising unemployment, growing social and economic inequalities and, consequently, deteriorating quality of life for the majority of the population, profiled development programmes (small-scale production, handicraft projects, training, reskilling, etc.) were supposed to create social safety nets and prevent the rise of poverty and especially feminisation of poverty (Craske 2003). They pro-

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<sup>6</sup> In the 1990s the introduction of gender mainstreaming in the Mexican politics resulted in the development of the so-called “gender industry,” including the newly established gender studies centres (e.g. PUEG UNAM and PIEM COLMEX) that train experts for, among other things, the implementation of development programmes for women.

<sup>7</sup> Programmes introduced under the pressure of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in the so-called “developing countries”; their implementation was a condition for access to further loans by those institutions or for lowering interest on loans already disbursed. The key aspect of neoliberal development programs in Latin America since the 1980s.

vided means for modest existence and basic survival of local communities, while reducing the risk of social unrest and dissent (Cf. Chossudovsky 2003).

Safety net programmes aimed at mitigating the human cost of the neoliberal economic transformation were extended to the groups affected most severely by the privatisation of healthcare, withdrawal of food subsidies and liberalisation of commerce. A typical example of the kind is the implementation of a series of government programmes addressed to poor women in cities and rural communities (especially indigenous ones): the *Mujeres en Solidaridad* programme as part of PRONASOL (*Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* 1988–94), PROGRESA (*Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación*, 1997–2002) or *Oportunidades* (2002–2014) renamed *Prospera* in 2014 (Craske 2003; Benería 2003; Vizcarra Bordi, Romero 2008; Vizcarra Bordi 2009; Vizcarra Bordi 2014). Across much of Mexico, the long-term presence of this type of social assistance programmes (*programas de asistencia social*) had profound effects on social relations within local communities, fostering political clientelism, transforming gender relations, fuelling animosity between ethnic and religious groups, and, last but not least, causing profound changes in consumption patterns.

### Mazahua Region: Some Background

I began my research in the northern part of the State of Mexico in 2011 with a series of field trips with a group of Polish and Mexican scientists. These trips familiarised me with the characteristics of the region. During my second visit in 2012 I conducted fieldwork (in-depth interviews with elements of life story and participant observation) in *Ranchería La Soledad* with members of the *Pjoxte* Cooperative; I also talked with non-governmental organisations' employees who have worked with them over the years. The body of data I had collected was supplemented with observations during two short follow-up visits in the Mazahua region in the years 2014 and 2015.

By focusing on a single organisation and a specific group of people in a particular time and place, and performing concurrent analysis of press materials, webpages of non-governmental organisations, and government programmes, I was able to analyze the nature and trace the course of various developmental efforts within the local context. The use of feminist anthropology methods, according to which we not only study the experience of women, but also give them voice, helped me understand the impact of these activities on the life of Indian women who are members of *Pjoxte* and on the overall functioning of the local Mazahua community.

The site of my research was a small (population approx. 900) village of *Ranchería La Soledad*, located 15 kilometres from the main municipal centre of San Felipe del Progreso, in the north-western part of the state of Mexico, which has the highest concentration of Mazahuas. An estimated one-third of the entire group is thought to live here (Gonzales Ortiz, Vizcarra Bordi 2006). In the San Felipe municipality they make up 63% of population, for 31% Mazahua is their primary language. In *Ranchería La Soledad* only several dozen people speak it fluently, but all think of themselves as *pueblo Mazahua*.<sup>8</sup> The whole area is

<sup>8</sup> Estimated based on interviews.

fraught with progressing environmental degradation, high rates of social exclusion, illiteracy, poverty (including feminisation of poverty) and malnourishment, long-term structural unemployment, and, consequently, rising migration, both seasonal and long-time — to the Federal District (which has been the destination for migrants women for a long time [Cf. Arizpe 1975; Oehmichen Bazán 2005]), and to the United States and in recent decades to Canada (Skoczek 2011).

Socio-economic changes that have adversely affected the Mazahua community in recent decades are attributable primarily to the neglect of agriculture, the state's withdrawal from programmes supporting small farms coupled with the liberalisation of trade as a consequence of Mexico entering into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the USA and Canada. All these factors, along with diminishing soil fertility due to erosion and degradation of land have led to the crisis of local agriculture, significant reduction in economic activity across multiple Indian communities, and, consequently—high unemployment rates in the region. Supposedly in order to alleviate the problem, the state introduced, among others, programmes promoting the so-called sustainable agriculture, organic production of vegetables, husbandry, food processing for the emerging large-city markets, targeting niche markets. The actual result was accelerated privatisation and neoliberalisation of agriculture, leading to further marginalisation of small farmers and deterioration of indigenous communities (Skoczek 2013).

In recent years, the Mazahua Region, including the San Felipe del Progreso municipality considered “the most indigenous” has been colonised by the activities of various state agencies and non-governmental organisations. The area has become saturated with projects to alleviate poverty and activate local communities to engage in new agricultural activities, build human capital, change behaviour patterns, including gender relations (with the latter programmes addressed primarily to women), etc. As a result, the survival and wellbeing of households, the condition of local communities, investments in infrastructure, etc. depend on two factors: first and foremost money transfers, both from local migrants (with Mexico City as the main destination) and from abroad, and, increasingly, funding and other forms of support (*apoyos*) available through development and social assistance programmes. In recent decades, they have become the basis for the survival strategy of the Indian families and communities in the Mazahua Region (Cf. Appendini, De Luca 2008; Vizcarra Bordi, Romero 2008; Vizcarra Bordi 2014).

Other factors significantly affecting the condition of local communities include gradual urbanisation and the emergence of new, urban lifestyles, introduced mostly by returning migrant men and women (social remittances; Cf. Levitt 1998). In *Ranchería La Soledad*, as well as in most other nearby villages, the cultural landscape is changing rapidly. New facilities include a bakery, flower shop, patisserie, hairdresser's, a poolroom, etc., as well as several new buildings, though not as impressive as the “Californian villas” (*casas californianas*) constructed in neighbouring villages. The community here has stopped depending on farming for sustenance, it is no longer agriculture that determines the life of families and households. Their roles are increasingly transformed from production to social reproduction and consumption. Agriculture is no longer the key factor determining individual identity (Appendini, De Luca 2008). The nature of the socio-cultural changes in the region is accurately captured by the phrase “rurality without agriculture” (*ruralidad sin agricul-*

*tura*) proposed by the Mexican researchers of rural areas, Kirsten Appendini and Gabriela Torres-Mazuera (2008).

The above account of socio-economic changes of the recent decades, especially the increased intra- and extra-regional mobility of the population, school enrollment ratio, the impact of the mass media and development programmes lead to the blending of traditional Mazahua cultural elements with (post)modern ones, and, consequently, intensified the processes of local culture's hybridisation (García Canclini 1989). In *Rancharía La Soledad* the older generation still speaks the Mazahua language on a daily basis, women wear plaits, traditional clothes (mainly *quesquemel*) and jewellery, use traditional Indian sweat baths (*temazcal*), consult healers (*curanderos*), families erect shrines (*oratorios*) associated with a syncretic cult of crosses (Cf. Gonzales Martínez 2011), spend a lot of time and resources on community work, primarily by participating in the *cargos* system and preparing religious festivals. At the same time, the use of mobile phones is ubiquitous, processed food is consumed, schoolchildren are learning English (rather than Mazahua), while their mothers, at various, often mandatory talks, courses and training sessions are indoctrinated with new models of behaviour, instructed about contraception, women's rights, healthy nutrition of children etc. Thus, individualistic attitudes, including the ideas of capital accumulation, saving and individual success are promoted. These elements of the Weberian work ethic are also present in the activities of Protestant churches and non-governmental organisations proselytising intensely in the region.

### The *Pjoxte* Cooperative

The cultural landscape of the Mazahua Region is deeply marked by traces of development initiatives conducted by state agencies, NGOs, as well as those undertaken by inhabitants of individual municipalities. During field research, our attention was drawn by the “thankful” murals dotting the countryside, praising the benefits of the state government's activities or “Mr. Governor”<sup>9</sup> himself, obvious signs of the political clientelism prevalent in the area. Local development initiatives were presented to our research team at a seminar organized by the administration of the Intercultural University of the State of Mexico (*Universidad Intercultural del Estado del México*, UIEM) of San Felipe del Progreso. That was when we first came across *Pjoxte*<sup>10</sup>—the Indian Cooperative whose activity was guided by the Agency for Sustainable Development and the Entrepreneurship Incubator. The next day we went to *Rancharía La Soledad* to meet members of *Pjoxte* and visit their headquarters (meeting hall, processing centre, garden, composting toilets, etc.). The facilities were constructed using environmentally-friendly technology, while the processing centre itself looked like a small factory: white tiles and workers wearing protective clothing, with drawings on the walls presenting hygienic procedures.

<sup>9</sup> The murals were paying tribute to Enrique Peña Nieto, the governor of the State of Mexico in the years 2005–2011 from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the current President of Mexico (2012–2018).

<sup>10</sup> The names of the cooperative and its members are authentic: my interlocutors asked me to retain the actual names of the village, organisation, and their own.

The history of the small cooperative, counting, at the time of research, only 16 members, dates back to the year 2000, when the NGO called GRUPEDSAC (*Grupo para Promover la Educación y el Desarrollo Sustentable*) started “activating” indigenous villages in the San Felipe del Progreso municipality. GRUPEDSAC, whose main goal is to support the social and economic development of local communities, operates directly in indigenous *pueblos* through Training Centres that promote the use of organic technologies and eco-farming as sustainable alternatives for rural areas and as means of combating poverty. One such centre established at Ranchería La Soledad started organising training for women and men, in subjects such as construction of composting toilets, water silos, and handicrafts. This was followed by programs promoting gardening, raising chickens and rabbits, production of eggs, etc.

In 2003, when GRUPEDSAC was operating in around a dozen native communities in the region, the decision was made to turn the emerging groups into independent and self-governing entities (*autogestivos*), so that they would organize themselves and seek funding independently. Using resources made available by the Merced Foundation (which supports pro-equality and anti-poverty efforts, as well as the development of civil society), eight communities established a cooperative. The new organisation called itself *Pjoxte* (a name invented by an anthropologist teaching the Mazahua language at UIEM); a logo was designed, as well as a slogan capturing the cooperative’s mission (placed both on the main building, and the packaging of foods produced by *Pjoxte*): “*Somos mujeres y hombres campesin@s mazahuas que trabajamos por un mejor nivel de vida, cuidando la naturaleza para nuestr@s niñas y niños.*”<sup>11</sup> Reflecting gender equality, emphasising the identity of *Pjoxte*’s members (peasants and Mazahua Indians), highlighting sustainable growth and individual responsibility for the future, the slogan faithfully expresses the agenda of the organisations that sponsor the cooperative.

In 2006, the buildings of the *Pjoxte* headquarters at Ranchería la Soledad were erected at the land donated by one of the families, paid for by funding from a variety of sources (e.g. Merced Foundation, the French and Canadian embassies). Members of the cooperative worked at the construction. However, the organisation’s independence proved elusive: that same year it started working closely with UIEM. The centre provided location for work experience training for MA students (majoring in sustainable development), who are also taking part in the construction of new additions to the centre.

Two years later a formal cooperation agreement was signed by *Pjoxte*, UIEM, and GRUPEDSAC. The original idea was for *Pjoxte* to be an independent, self-governing, and agriculturally self-sustaining organisation (selling its surplus produce), with the other two institutions in supporting roles. Four areas of operation were specified:

- agricultural production (eco-friendly farming, greenhouses, sheep farming, chicken farms, orchards, construction of farming terraces and fish farms, etc.)
- fruit, vegetable and herb processing (multiple training courses organised)
- eco-friendly construction (toilets, water silos, kitchens, etc.)

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<sup>11</sup> We are the Mazahua women and men, farmers working to improve our standard of living, caring for nature, for the benefit of our daughters and sons.

- cultural and institutional reinforcement (many workshops on gender equality, obtaining funding from multiple sources that were meant to identify a group of promoters and future leaders of the organisation)

To further stimulate development and take advantage of funding opportunities, in 2010 *Pjoxte* established two social enterprises (*empresas sociales*) meant to employ mostly women, who at that time constituted 85% of cooperative's members. One company was to produce organic eggs, the other process food. The former excelled from the very beginning; the communities involved were better organized, and the enterprise quickly started making profit. The other one, despite having infrastructure for jam and marinade production *no avanzaba* (failed to thrive), as the people I spoke to often said. This resulted in tensions within the cooperative, but also spurred into action a group of women who obtained a grant from *Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas* (CDI) to develop production by indigenous women. This show of independence by the Indian women who have been trained for many years to "take matters in their own hands" led to open conflict with the remainder of *Pjoxte* and the project coordinator at GRUPEDSAC. There was a split in the cooperative. Despite pressure, the group producing preserves refused to comply with GRUPEDSAC's "recommendations," resisted threats, e.g. that "troublemakers" who obtained funding on their own and the family that donated land for the centre would be removed from the organisation. The result was that the centre was closed for several months.

In July 2011, when we arrived in Ranchería la Soledad, the centre was again in business, and the food processing group (counting only about a dozen women and one man) retained the centre, name and logo of the organization. *Pjoxte* was selling its products (various fruit preserves, marinated chili, salsas, sweets, fruit liqueurs, etc.) at the organic food market held monthly by UIEM or at "native" product stands sponsored by CDI in the Valle de Bravo tourist resort. The cooperative received institutional support from UIEM and was included in the university's new initiative, *La Incubadora de Empresas*, which provided it with bookkeeping and legal services; students from the university assisted in the development of marketing strategies. With the help of UIEM employee as its head, *Pjoxte* made an effort to register the trademark, develop a table of products' nutritional values, obtain organic farming certificates and find new markets, mostly niche ones associated with the changing models of consumption in the urban middle class. In February 2012, through the intermediary of UIEM's vice-chancellor, they negotiated with the Chamber of Commerce (*Cámara de Comercio, Servicios y Turismo*, CANACO) to have those products displayed in special showcases at restaurants. Members of the cooperative were dreaming up plans to expand the centre, for example by adding a small kindergarten so that women could be free to work, and to expand their scope of operations by organising workshops on vegetable and fruit processing for schools and other institutions.

### **The Social Assistance Industry: Grassroot Perspective**

In the years 2011–2012, the *Pjoxte* cooperative counted fifteen female and one male member, but it was the one man that presented the organisation at the seminar organised by

UIEM. He read a description of the cooperative's operations, distributed leaflets and advertised products he had brought for sale. When I asked why a cooperative of Mazahua women was represented by a man, I was informed that during the seminar the women had to take part in mandatory lectures delivered as part of the *Oportunidades* programme. Later it turned out that Angel indeed frequently represented the cooperative before the University and local administration, which not only reflected the local cultural model according to which a native cooperative or organisation in the public sphere is usually represented by a man, but also resulted from the limited availability of women, whose time was carefully managed by various aid organisations.

The degree to which the Mazahua women were involved in the local social assistance industry (the term *industria de asistencia social* appeared frequently in my interviews) became apparent to me as soon as I started my fieldwork at *Pjoxte*. Arranging face-to-face interviews with individuals proved to be very difficult; we usually talked while making preserves together or during training for women from other communities organised at the centre. The women explained their lack of free time by various responsibilities, a significant proportion of which involved participation in a variety of projects aimed at improving their families' quality of life (Lutz 2014). Over the past several years my interviewees on average took part in 3–4 programmes simultaneously, some of them for many years. To illustrate the scale of the social assistance industry in the San Felipe del Progreso municipality, let me briefly describe programmes, activities and types of support (*apoyos*) that the female members of *Pjoxte* have been part of:

A variety of production programmes (constructing greenhouses, husbandry, egg production, handcrafts, food processing, etc.) administered by GRUPEDSAC, funded in recent years by the Ministry of Agriculture, Husbandry, Rural Development, Fishing and Food (*Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación* SAGARPA). All women who make up *Pjoxte* today participated in the last couple of years in 1 to 3 projects.

The aforementioned *Oportunidades* programme (renamed *Prospera* in 2014) run by the Ministry of Social Development (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social*, SEDESOL) aimed at “creating equal opportunities for economic and social growth” and building human capital by combating poverty. The program transfers cash to poor families. The three areas covered by the programme are education, health, and nutrition, which is why financial aid is conditioned on children attending school, visits at healthcare centres and improvements in nutrition levels. The persons managing the cash and responsible for meeting the conditions are mothers. All women with whom I worked at *Pjoxte* were beneficiaries of *Oportunidades*, some of them as long as 8 years.<sup>12</sup>

The *Visión Mundial (niñ@s)* programme of the local branch of the international organisation World Vision International that works with children, families and communities in areas with high levels of social exclusion. With its Protestant origins, the organisation is also active in Catholic communities, and the integral part of its work is evangeliza-

<sup>12</sup> It should be emphasised that not all mothers of school children at *Ranchería La Soledad* participated in the programme; the qualifying criteria were unclear and highly controversial, which often led to conflicts (Cf. Vizcarra Bordi, Guardarrama Romero 2008).

tion. Children receive allowances paid for by foreigners. Several children of the women I interviewed were taking part in *Visión Mundial*.

Programmes of the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (*Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas*, CDI), in particular the one addressed to women. Its purpose, as stated at the CDI website, is to constantly improve the living conditions and social status of indigenous women living in regions characterised by high and extreme social exclusion, by initiating and strengthening women's participation in production programmes. At the time of my research all members of *Pjoxte* were involved in a CDI project.

*70 y más*—a nationwide programme of the Ministry of Social Development (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social*, SEDESOL), a kind of state pension for all Mexicans over the age of 70. The annuity in the amount of 500 peso (in 2012) is paid every 2 months; participants in the programme must attend various seminars and training courses related to health care etc. Two female members of *Pjoxte* and the parents and in-laws of several others are in the programme, which means that the women have additional responsibilities, helping family members who are illiterate and often speak very little Spanish with formalities, as well as bringing them to meetings.

“One kilogram of aid” (*Un Kilo de Ayuda*)—a federal government programme to combat malnutrition of children, operating in four states: Chiapas, Oaxaca, Yucatán and the State of Mexico; in the latter it works together with the state administration and The National System for Integral Family Development (*Desarrollo Integral de la Familia*, DiF), providing additional food to 6 thousand malnourished children, mostly native, in 114 communities. All women in *Pjoxte* who have school-age children benefit from the programme.

“Warm breakfast at school” [Desayunos Escolares Calientes]—a state government (a regional branch of The National System for Integral Family Development) programme operating at the local school in which the administration provides products for school committees (composed of mothers) to make a balanced (calorically and nutritionally, according to the so-called “Healthy Nutrition” plan) breakfast for preschool and school children.<sup>13</sup> Two members of *Pjoxte* participated in this programme.

*Antorcha Campesina* [El Movimiento Antorchista], an organisation of “Mexico's poor,” affiliated with the Institutional Revolutionary Party whose task is to obtain funding from governmental institutions (e.g. the Ministry of Social Development, *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social*, SEDESOL) for the construction or modernisation of infrastructure in communities (e.g. building schools, sewage systems, houses, electrification etc.). Over the past few years, the families of several of my interviewees took part in *Antorcha* actions.

Training in marketing, management, developing a “managerial attitude” (*la actitud empresarial*) organised as part of *Incubadora de Empresas*, a development programme conducted at UIEM since 2009 aimed at preventing unemployment by promoting entrepreneurship.

<sup>13</sup> Programme targeting areas with high levels of social exclusion, in various Mexican states (State of Mexico, Puebla, Hidalgo, Guerrero).

Programmes by other state institutions, non-governmental organisations (including the Protestant *Misión Mazahua* or *Fundación Mazahua*,<sup>14</sup> but also the National Women's Institute INMUJER) offering courses, training in reproductive health, gender equality, domestic violence, child nutrition, etc.<sup>15</sup>

To sum up, programmes in which my interviewees participated were designed to meet the needs of communities with high levels of social exclusion, including extreme poverty. These are essentially safety-net programmes to moderate the consequences of progressive neoliberalisation of increasingly more domains of social and economic life, which is the true cause of said exclusion. The State of Mexico is a telling example of such phenomena. Here, the long-term neoliberal policies have resulted in ongoing marginalization of native communities, among them the Mazahuas. The local development industry focuses on the so-called “activation of women” by offering them several profiled programmes that fall into two categories: educational (new skills, knowledge regarding reproductive health, gender equality and empowerment of women) or supporting education (mostly of children) and promoting the entry of women into the public sphere of production. In either case, the main strategy of encouraging women to take part in the projects is to invoke their traditional roles as mothers and nurturers, to appeal to female altruism and stress responsibility for the well-being of the community (Cf. McClenaghan 1997; Craske 1999; Kunz 2011; Chant, Seetman 2012). The politicisation of motherhood is a way to introduce and reinforce free-market policy within native communities; it contributes to the production of new neo-liberal subjectivities, including the transformation of motherhood and, more generally, the shape of the local gender contract.

### **Mothers, Nurturers, Producers**

Intense promotion, in the above described development projects as well as in the mass media (e.g. TV commercials and social campaigns, soap operas, etc.), of a new set of behaviours and attitudes to be encouraged in a “good, responsible native mother” succeeded in changing the local model of motherhood. It has become a cultural hybrid, a dynamic collage of traditional roles mixed with elements derived from the dominant Mexican discourse

<sup>14</sup> Established in 1997, it operates in the Mazahua Region, running production and education programmes, including those concerning health and nutrition, many of them addressed to women, [www.fundacionmazahua.org.mx](http://www.fundacionmazahua.org.mx)

<sup>15</sup> In 2014 the government of Mexico launched a new nationwide social development campaign The National Crusade Against Hunger (*Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre*) to be implemented by the Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL). The campaign targets urban and rural areas of the country with the highest rates of social exclusion, poverty and malnutrition, especially among children and adolescents, including the Mazahua Region in the State of Mexico. Among other things, community dinners (*comedores comunitarios*) have been established. The purpose of the programme is to improve the nutrition status of children up to 11 years of age, teenagers continuing education, pregnant women, nursing mothers, people with disabilities or over 65 years of age, and others “in need.” The operation of community dinners is theoretically managed by the local authorities but in fact it is mostly based on unpaid work of local women who, on a daily basis, prepare meals from products provided by the government. In addition, women receive instruction on proper nutrition, growth and development of children. <http://www.gob.mx/sedesol/acciones-y-programas/comedores-comunitarios>

on motherhood, as well as (post)modern social models that emphasize women's rights and individualism.

The core element of the emerging, vernacular pattern of mothering is the model of relations still deeply ingrained in native communities such as Ranchería La Soledad, which assumes complementarity of gender roles, with different tasks and spheres of activity for men and women (Hryciuk 2009a). Within that model, the main responsibility of Mazahua women is to reproduce the ethnic group in the biological, as well as cultural and social sense. Women are supposed to ensure physical survival of family and community while facilitating the transmission and preservation of cultural values (language, religion, traditional lifestyles, etc.). In addition, Indian women, especially those still wearing traditional clothes, jewellery and hairstyles, are still viewed as embodied symbols of local, indigenous and sometimes national tradition (Cf. Yuval-Davis 1997; Vizcarra Bordi 2002; Zarate Vidal 2004; Hryciuk 2005).

This is why the development programmes that strongly emphasise the responsibility of Indian women for the family's physical survival, as well as its quality of life, prove to be successful at motivating them to maximize their efforts. Consequently, the increased labour load on women buffers the impact of growing pauperisation of communities which results from deepening crisis, dwindling state support and neo-liberalisation of subsequent spheres of life (Craske 2003; Hryciuk 2004). The daily life of my interviewees at Ranchería La Soledad is filled with household chores (including gardening and raising animals), looking after children and elders, participation in several development programmes, as well as looking for new subsidies and forms of support (Vizcarra Bordi 2002; González Ortiz, Vizcarra Bordi 2006). Promoted by development discourse this triple burden (*la triple jornada*) is meant to ensure success in projects undertaken individually as well as collectively and to bring tangible benefits to families and communities. Instead, it adds to the women's workload, extending its hours, regulating their everyday activity, mobility and time management, making women solely responsible for the fate of their families and the future of their children. Moreover, when women become the heads of poor households they suffer from overwork and lack of time to satisfy their own needs. It results in the deterioration of their health, poor nutrition, and, ultimately, unfavourable changes in the situation of the women themselves (Cf. Vizcarra Bordi 2009; Chant, Sweetman 2012; Lutz 2014).

During interviews, the educators from UIEM working in San Felipe del Progreso said openly that it was now the women who supported, mostly from social assistance programmes, the majority of households in the municipality. In these same conversations, however, they expressed their concern that all those efforts undertaken by the Indian women were still insufficient, and, worse than that, the support and money transfers they received were making them indolent, numb and passive (*se vuelven flojas*). As those responsible for the condition of their families, they should now *ponerse las pilas*, which literally means put in new batteries, find motivation to engage in new activities, use the available opportunities (mainly take part in training), with the view to change their attitudes to more "business-oriented" ones (to catch *feeling empresarial* was the *Span-English* expression used by the head of UIEM's *Incubadora de Empresas*).

As dictated by the again fashionable development strategy that focuses on increasing women's productivity, they are expected to *generar recursos económicos*—to start making

money. Women's unpaid labour (reproductive, in the household or for the community) is thus invalidated. Unlike their male counterparts earning "hard cold cash" as migrant heroes, women are explicitly seen as unproductive (Kunz 2011).<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the programmes that the women of *Pjoxte* participate in burden them with new tasks. Besides earning money, they are expected to drive the grassroots modernisation of the Indian communities. Following the model borrowed from the dominant, Mestizo ideal of intensive motherhood (Hryciuk 2009b, 2010), the Mazahua women are to become new expert mothers watching over the health (including reproductive health), nutrition, and proper behaviour of their families. They are charged with reversing gender relations in relationships and families despite the lack of educational programmes on gender equality, health or contraception for men. They are also expected to adopt and start promoting the pro-managerial mind-set and, more generally, individualistic attitudes. This, in the still predominantly traditional, Catholic Indian community, where cooperation and social reproduction is reinforced by the system of religious obligations (*cargos*), is a near-impossible task.

The operations of the social assistance industry may also bring about a wide range of risks. The new social roles of Mazahua women threaten the traditional model of gender complementarity, which may (and often does) lead to increased control and violence on the part of men, especially when the women's efforts to improve the situation of the family fail to bring the expected benefits. Besides intensifying domestic violence, strengthening patriarchal power, and inciting frequent conflicts within communities (resulting in the disintegration of traditional support networks), the participation of women in development initiatives results in growing dependence on *apoyos* and, consequently, the reproduction and reinforcement of political clientelism (Vizcarra Bordi, Guardarrama Romero 2008; Vizarra Bordi 2014; Lutz 2014).

The Mazahua women who, according to the state development policy, are supposed to be the agents of local development and promoters of neo-liberal modernisation, are still seen within their communities as the depositaries of traditional community values. Attempting to meet these conflicting demands is very problematic and often provokes resistance. Contention comes in a variety of forms, since women who express their dissatisfaction and opposition to the expectations forced upon them "make creative use" of their social roles. I shall revisit this issue later.

### The Empowered Poor

The agenda and implementation of profiled projects in the Mazahua Region faithfully reflect the currently dominant trends in development policies, in particular the approach of smart economics that treats women as "development resource."<sup>17</sup> According to the guidelines of international organisations, e.g. the World Bank, it economically pays off to invest

<sup>16</sup> For that reason money received under the *Oportunidades* programme are referred to as *apoyos*—support, and not *pagos*—payments for reproductive work rendered within the household.

<sup>17</sup> Since the mid-1990s, or, more specifically, since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), gender equality and empowerment of women became the basis for development agenda. Policy guidelines are contained in the UN initiative called Millennium Development Goals and the publications of the World Bank, e.g. the Gender Action Plan: Gender Equality as Smart Politics 2007–2010.

in women, primarily by educating them so that their activities can lead to improved health of their families and communities, higher standard of living, and economic growth. For this reason, the key feature of women activation projects has been to promote their empowerment, enhance agency and independence (Craske 2003; Momsen 2010; Kunz 2011; Chant, Sweetman 2012). This element is always present, if not dominant in the curricula of most training courses and workshops attended over the years by my interviewees at *Ranchería La Soledad*.

During my research in the Mazahua Region I was interested in the ways in which Indian women evaluate the effects and benefits of training on gender equality and the empowerment of women. How do the members of *Pjoxte* see their participation in the social assistance industry with its countless workshops and seminars? Their opinions and comments proved to be highly ambivalent. The women I interviewed, poorly educated Indians (none of the women had completed primary education), often approached the trainings as supplementary education and opportunity for personal growth.<sup>18</sup>

They pointed out its positive aspects, such as a chance to learn and gain knowledge on various topics (including information about women's rights), as well as new, practical skills (handicrafts, food processing, etc.). In our conversations they stressed that participation in courses and work at the centre provided them with opportunities to "get out of the house," work and socialise with other women, establish new social relationships and support networks, and that it could also be a kind of hobby (*pasatiempo*), which is consistent with the newly emerging lifestyle of the Mazahua community described as "rurality without agriculture" (Appendini, Torres-Mazuera 2008). Some openly stated that they have gained a new perspective on their social reality, "knew more about the world," had more personal freedom and felt *mas empoderadas*.

At the same time, they insisted in the interviews that participation in projects saddled them with additional responsibilities and work, consumed their time for very little economic benefit, failed to significantly improve their households' financial standing; they noted the increasing dependence of native communities on social assistance programmes, as well as the mechanisms of resource re-distribution associated with the states withdrawal from financing healthcare and education. My interviewees used money received from different programmes (primarily *Oportunidades*) to pay for healthcare (usually visits with one of the doctors on call at the headquarters of one of the NGO's) or to support the existence of the local primary school (by paying for infrastructure renovations and supplementing teachers' salaries). The awareness of their situation was accurately summed up by one of Mazahua women in *Pjoxte*. When during our interview I mentioned the term *empoderamiento*, I heard in response that in the local community of women it was at best *empoderamiento a medias*, that is a "half-baked" women's empowerment.

A different perspective was offered by women belonging to the group of "promoters," established by the social assistance industry pursuant to the smart economics principles that emphasize the development of women's leadership (*liderazgo femenino*). In the Mazahua

<sup>18</sup> By contrast, their daughters who resided and worked in the state capital (Toluca) or in Mexico City and only sporadically helped at the centre had secondary education, and one of them was even an extramural student. The women attributed the rising level of education in the community to the availability of scholarships within the *Oportunidades* programme.

Region, promoters are mostly the Indian women who have completed a required amount of training and courses. Their task is to work with development organisations and serve as intermediaries between the social assistance industry and local communities. These women reap the most benefits from participation in the social assistance industry, including higher social status, prestige, and slight improvement in financial standing. These are individual success stories (*apoderamiento*): as long as there is no significant improvement in the situation of the community, the power relations and structural determinants of poverty remain unchanged etc. (Appendini, de Luca 2008).

One of the local promoters is the head of *Pjoxte*, Graciela who, despite her young age, is already a true veteran of development programmes. In our interviews she kept emphasizing the decisive role of equality-oriented education in the improvement of her own and her family's well-being. Most importantly, she credited it with putting an end to domestic violence, transforming her marital relations towards a partnership model, re-educating her husband (who today is not only working with the women at *Pjoxte*, but is quite fluent in the equality discourse), as well as her own perseverance in following her plans and seeking self-development despite strong opposition to Indian women's presence in the public sphere.<sup>19</sup> She not only declared feeling empowered as a person and a woman, but she also proved it by successfully applying for a grant for the Indian producers to CDI and then defending her position under pressure from GRUPEDSAC, which I have already discussed.

Graciela likes attending training courses, she treats them as her own "university," soaking up the information to perform her duties as promoter adequately, including stimulating women to undertake new activities, sharing with them her knowledge and skills. Besides introducing new food processing technologies and recipes, her main task today is to maintain commitment among the women engaged in the project, and to pursue a change in the mentality and attitudes of the women in *Pjoxte* to more market-oriented, managerial, and individualistic. Using equality and emancipation discourse based on the empowerment claim, she promotes self-employment and improved productivity of Indian women; acting in good faith, she has become the agent of advancing economic liberalisation of increasingly more aspects of social life.

Thus, the empowerment of women within the framework of smart economics does not lead to gaining control over their own lives in order to make claims for social change and demands for state support. Neither does it enhance cooperation between project participants. It brings about only negligible improvements in the social position, autonomy and agency of women (Young 1995). They are not expected to be more independent (which Graciela found out during her conflict with GRUPEDSAC), but only to change their mindsets and be more reachable. As such, the promoters are contributing to the creation and reproduction of neoliberal governmentality and, by extension, formation of neoliberal subjectivity. As noted by the American anthropologist Aiwa Ong: "the neoliberal subject is therefore not a citizen which claims on the state but a self-enterprising citizen-subject who is obliged to become an entrepreneur of himself or herself" (2006: 14).

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<sup>19</sup> The effects of development efforts on gender relations is exemplified by the marital history of the leaders of *Pjoxte*, Graciela and Ángel, presented in the documentary titled "Ángel," directed by Lilly Wolfensberger Scherz (2008).

The Mazahua women subjected to this type of indoctrination are in fact becoming “the empowered (by the equality discourse) poor” (*pobres empoderadas*), self-enterprising managers of poverty whose intense efforts fail to improve their own circumstances and those of their community. In addition, structural discrimination (including profiled assistance programmes) they experience as poor, native women, puts significant limitations on their agency, creating obstacles they are often unable to overcome in order to act in their best interest and satisfy their needs (Cf. Chant, Sweetman 2012), although it does not necessarily eradicate all means of resistance.

The majority of recently published analyses of agendas, implementation and effects of projects addressed to women fails to devote sufficient attention or completely ignores the collective agency of women leading to group actions, mobilisations or social movements criticising the neoliberal model of development, confronting structural discrimination and offering their own critical reading of social transformation (Wilson 2012). There are also few ethnographic studies of grassroot experiences of women participating in development programs. Researchers are instead predominantly focusing on quantitative indicators, education methods, employment and the leadership of individual women (Eisenstein 2009; Chant, Sweetman 2012). Therefore, in the following part of my analysis I briefly trace the vernacular forms of resistance employed by the Mazahua women against the extrinsically imposed models of emancipation and local development.

### **On the (Im)possibility of Resistance**

The ability to act independently, potential for agency and resistance of Indian women may be seen differently, depending on the perspective of the person evaluating them and the purposes of such evaluation. In Mexico, the dominant cultural discourse on women from traditional indigenous groups, usually poor and marginalised, is reflected in the ways they are presented in the public sphere and mass media. They are situated either in the context of the current *light* version of multiculturalism, with images of women in traditional clothes illustrating the efforts of state agencies within the politics of cultural diversity. (Cf. *Textiles Mazahua* 2011), or their photographs adorn folders and websites of social assistance programmes of which poor Indian women are the main beneficiaries. This manoeuvre paves the way for the fetishization of the social and economic conditions of the Indian communities and leads to exotization of poverty, recasting it as the problem of “internal others,” i.e. backwards native communities. The dominant discourse usually presents the Indian women as the “passive others.”

On the other hand, as the present analysis demonstrates, from the perspective of the transnational discourse of development, women of the Global South are no longer seen as passive victims of their circumstances. Nowadays the emphasis is on their ability to make decisions and choices in their particular social environments. This approach radically shifts attention away from the material and ideological power structures, even though it was originally intended to undermine them. Women are expected to become entrepreneurial subjects with boundless coping abilities within the strict confines of the neoliberal model of development (Wilson 2012).

In the Mazahua Region, the most spectacular example of social resistance against the developmental agenda and a manifestation of the empowerment of women was *El Movimiento Mazahua por la Defensa del Agua* (the Mazahua Movement for the Defence of Water) active in the Villa de Allende municipality in the years 2003–2007. This grassroots social movement of the Indian women demanded access to water in the amount and of the quality that would satisfy the needs of local communities (agriculture, potable water), as well as working out a sustainable development plan for the region in collaboration with the Mazahua communities. Despite wide social support, strategic self-representation (the Indian women acted as mothers responsible for the survival of the community, but also as neo-Zapatista soldiers), fluency in the discourse of sustainable development and indigenous rights, as well as cooperation with other social movements, within several years the local administration succeeded in demobilizing the movement fulfilling only a small portion of demands for improvements in local communities (Hryciuk 2005; Martínez Treviño 2007). Unsuccessful mobilization of the Mazahua women can be explained by the political weakness of the indigenous/Mazahua identity in the region, the sway of political clientelism, and, most importantly, the programme of the movement, based on explicit critique of the neoliberal model as the organising principle of the Mexican economy in recent decades. In such circumstances the proposed vision of economic and social transformation of the region failed to garner broad support, especially that it had been put forward by a movement lead by the most marginalized group: poor Indian women from rural areas, the “passive others” entering the public sphere outside the legitimised spaces of women’s activity: the household and the local indigenous community.

My interviewees at *Pjoxte* were not participating in mass mobilisations or actions in the public sphere (with the exception of a handful of *Antorcha Campesina* pickets), instead resorting to less spectacular but also safer everyday forms of resistance, often very subtle and concealed in everyday life (Scott 1985). The women were not willing to passively submit to the regimes imposed by the development industry, instead they negotiated to some extent or even sabotaged its operation, e.g. by being late or avoiding participation in seminars they felt were a waste of time, during training they exchanged comments and gossip, often in the Mazahua language, so that the Mestizo educator could not understand them, or used the time for handicraft making. They were trying to get the most out of their participation in projects, investing only so much time and effort to maximise benefits for themselves and their families. There have been cases where women refused to take part in a project or withdrew at some stage. They were also quite adept at taking advantage of their traditional social roles, as well as the popular stereotypes regarding the “passiveness and conservatism” of Mazahua women. They demanded support for their families as responsible mothers while resisting pressure to change their approach to life to a more “managerial” one. By strategically using the stereotype of traditional, passive Indian women, they resisted being involved in new projects (that were unlikely to succeed but required a lot of time and effort), citing their supposed ignorance, lack of skill and unfamiliarity with the workings of the “business world.”

Another area of resistance for Mazahua women was participating actively in the system of religious obligations (*cargos*). At Ranchería La Soledad, as in many other Catholic communities, it serves to reinforce relationships based on support and reciprocity by repro-

ducing the system of extended kinship (*parentesco*). Taking up *cargos* builds the prestige of individuals and families; by performing them people (predominantly men) gain the right to participate in the community's political leadership. Sponsoring *fiestas* for holy patrons is a significant expense for the household budget, financed both from remittances and funding received from social assistance programmes.

NGO employees experienced in working with both Catholic and Protestant communities often complained that Catholic women devoted too much time, effort and money to organizing numerous lavish ceremonies (religious *fiestas* and family gatherings). Protestants who were more easily persuaded to use the same funds as inputs in production projects were, according to the NGO employees, much better disciplined and willing to internalize individualistic and pro-market attitudes. Paradoxically, these perceived as more "modern" and developmentally viable Indian women are also seen as quite passive and malleable, subject to strong patriarchal power nowadays represented not by their usually absent husband, but by the pastor. By contrast, the same activists described women from *pueblos catolicos* as more independent, resourceful (capable of acting on behalf of other family members, speaking in public, at community gatherings), more difficult to control within projects aimed at making them "productive" and quite resistant to the new culture of neoliberal entrepreneurship.

At Ranchería La Soledad the traditional spheres of women's activity, especially the ritual space within folk Catholicism (*religiosidad popular*) and the ability to juggle gender stereotypes provide Mazahua women with the basic sense of agency, allowing them to skillfully navigate the projects in which they participate, accepting their beneficial aspects while resisting those they consider harmful or useless. Only in this limited way can they influence the rate and nature of progressing processes of neo-liberalisation and individualisation of community life.

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The flagship federal programme of human development called *Oportunidades* in which all the women of Pjoxte were taking part, was replaced in 2014 by the social inclusion programme (*programa de inclusión social*) named *Prospera* [Prosper]. In its new guise, besides emphasis on the education of children, family health and proper nutrition, poor mothers are expected to become economically self-sufficient. The programme promotes job creation through self-employment, entrepreneurship and further inclusion of women in production work and economic development. This means that the social assistance programme has been expanded with elements of smart economics, which places additional burdens on poor mothers. In addition, *Prospera* contains elements of old demographic policies of the 1970s meant to discipline poor native women, especially in rural areas, and to reduce reproduction rates. They are reflected in the statements by Mexican politicians, such as the Secretary of Social Development Rosario Robles, mentioned in the opening paragraph of this paper. In recent years these have not been isolated voices. The response of Mexican feminists to Robles speech was also symptomatic. In 2014, the feminist public intellectuals were typically finding excuses for Robles in the media, emphasising her "good intentions," including her concern with the wellbeing of poor chil-

dren and their families, thus exposing their own deeply rooted class and cultural prejudices.

In Mexico, feminist demands have been systematically hijacked by the state social and developmental policies since mid 1900s. Despite extensive critical literature within the framework of social sciences, including intersectional research in sociology, anthropology and economics documenting the effects of governmental programmes, such as *Oportunidades* (Zapata et al. 2003; Vizcarra Bordi, Guadarama Romero 2008; Vizcarra Bordi 2009; Lutz 2014), as well as more broadly examination of the relationship between feminist agenda and economic globalisation (Cf. Eistenstein 2009; Frazer 2009), the nature and scale of co-optation of feminist claims and discourse in the neoliberal version of political maternalism in recent decades has not been extensively discussed or analysed within the Mexican feminist movement.

Here it behoves us to remember the conclusions from the analysis of the government's family planning programmes in Peru in 1990s conducted by the American researcher Christina Ewig (2006). She points out the ways in which the Peruvian government appropriated and used the global feminist discourse and women's rights agenda for clearly eugenic and anti-women activities (e.g. the programme of illegal sterilization of Indian women), and demonstrates the collusion on the part of sections of the local women's movement in the development of these policies. Ewig emphasises the need to constantly monitor state action, even if the proposed policies on the surface appear to benefit women. She urges us to examine the relations between state and feminism, including state-feminism institutions, the relationship between urban middle class feminists and poor Indian women in rural areas, as well as the consequences of feminist and women's rights discourse being exploited by state and international institutions.

Ewig concludes her analysis stressing the need for multiple feminist locations:

...both pragmatic feminist groups that are willing to interact with the state and autonomous radical feminist groups able to strongly criticize state actions are essential to the success of feminist policy positions" since "for feminists appropriation of feminist discourse requires a continual effort to be precise about their own definitions, to critically observe the usages of these discourses, and to be willing to hold those who use these discourses accountable to their political intentions. Feminists must be on the leading edge of either defending or redefining particular concepts before others redefine them in undesirable ways (2006: 655).

In the context of progressing neo-liberalisation of social life on a global scale, the call for multiple feminist locations is becoming increasingly fundamental for women's movements in Mexico and elsewhere in the world.

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