

The takeover of the National Indigenous Peoples' Institute (INPI): the political experience of a disruptive action by the Otomí community in Mexico City

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Abstract

This paper presents an approach to the political experience of the Otomí communityⁱ living in Mexico City and its councillor Maricela Mejíaⁱⁱ, in their struggle for the right to housing, education, health and work. They have been making these demands for more than twenty years to cover basic needs, but they have been denied because of the marginalised and excluded conditions in which they live in the urban context.

The aim of this text is to show the struggle of the Otomí community as a collective subject can be understood as a defence of the territory, as a space that symbolises the cultural continuity, identity and political action of the original peoples.

This text focuses on the seizure of the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI) by the Otomí community on 12 October 2020. The INPI, as a government institution, has its antecedent in the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI)ⁱⁱⁱ, which took the reins of Mexican welfarism, promoting plans and projects focused on the improvement of "indigenous" communities, with development ideas.

The political participation of Otomi women in the takeover of the Institute has been fundamental, as they are the ones who have the spoken up in

front of government representatives, a situation in which women demand and play a leading role as interlocutors. In addition to proposing alternative forms of organization and resistance, based on accompaniment, listening and exchange with women from other indigenous peoples and other organizations in struggle.

This text recovers some of my experiences of my approach to this movement of struggle and accompaniment of the Otomí community in the takeover of the INPI. It also recovers the words and some experiences of the Otomí women's communication commission for the representation of their word and voice before the representatives of the Mexican government.

Keywords: *indigenous women, territorial defence, political subjectivities, social movements.*

Introduction

My interest in this paper is to give an account of the political participation of the Otomi Community resident in Mexico City who belongs to the National Indigenous Congress (CNI), a conglomerate of more than forty "peoples, nations and tribes" with the aim of strengthening their organizational forms and political self-determination of their forms of autonomy.^{iv}

Maricela Mejía belongs to the Otomi community and is also part of the Indigenous Council of Government (CIG). This Council was formed in 2016, after the V National Indigenous Congress (was held) in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico, and after consulting 523 communities in 25 states of the republic and 43 native languages belonging to the CNI, the creation of the Indigenous Council of Government (CIG) was accepted.

María de Jesús Patricio Martínez^v known as "Marichuy" was elected as spokesperson for the CIG and for the first time in the history of Mexico, an "indigenous" woman served as an independent pre-candidate to run in the presidential elections in July 2018. "Marichuy" is an example for many women in Mexico for her political participation and defence of territory, which is why it is important how she defines the meaning of territory: "the defence of territory encompasses everything, the waters, the forests, the land, the inhabitants, the animals, the hills, the ways of organising, the language, the clothing, that is the territory"^{vi}. The term land and territory- territory is not only a material dimension but also an immaterial one. In other words, the territorial dispute is also the dispute over forms, meanings and symbolic representations of territory in its immaterial sense, which it also seeks to dispossess (Rosset, 2016).

The Otomí community, through the takeover of the INPI, makes visible the lack of housing in the city, but also the dispossession of the territory of the original peoples and the right to inhabit the city, as Fabian Bonilla points out "living the experience of foreignness in one's own territory is also a process of dispossession of the territory" (2020). The defense of the territory in the dimensions that compose it expresses a wide repertoire of strategies based on their collective identities, but also on processes of configuration of subjectivities.

The takeover of the INPI was generated not only by the government's neglect of the Otomí community's demands for decades, but also by the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, a situation that exacerbated the conditions of structural exclusion and governmental abandonment. The contingency was not a reason to stop this struggle for decent housing. Given the precarious housing conditions in the community, how can one comply with the "stay at home" prescribed by the state discourse if one does not have one? Or how to be careful when washing hands, if running water is not available. Likewise, how to maintain social

distancing under conditions of overcrowding when living in plastic tents on the streets of the "camps" in two central neighbourhoods of Mexico City.

The women of the CIG and other women defenders of the territory are redefining imposed identities, even challenging the representations made by the nation (Millán, 2014) as silent "indigenous" women. This is why I emphasise a section on the political experience of Maricela Mejía.

My approach to the women of the CIG and, in this case, to the councillor Maricela Mejía, has been from a political stance (Restrepo, 2012), understood as doing action research through dialogue (Kaltmeier, 2012). This stance has to do with my own subjectivity and with the different places inhabited and experiences recognised as an "indigenous"^{vii} woman, a migrant, from the urban "periphery", but also as a doctoral student at a private university in Mexico City. Inhabiting places of conflict questions and challenges my gaze and my responsibility in this work.

Aura Cumes, of Katchikel-Maya origin, has reflected on the participation of "indigenous" women in the field of research, which - she mentions - takes place in the "life experience" of subalternity as an imposition and in the relationship of "knowledge and power" as a colonial inheritance. For Cumes, these spaces of research are spaces of power where it is necessary to struggle to assert one's voice (2018, p. 136) that is, to make, to create, to produce a space of enunciation. Given that the possibility of enunciation from other non-recognised or unauthorised places is made invisible, based on external labels that annul the possibility of speaking and being heard from other places and no longer being placed in places of subalternity (Cumes, 2018). For Linda Tuhiwai, researchers of "indigenous" origin remain in a struggle to enunciate from other places, in her case: the possibility of enunciating from the original language (2011). This can be understood as the production of decolonial narratives that break and displace the rigidity of colonial discourses. "Therefore, decolonial

narratives are proposed as part of a process of construction of referents of action, understanding and transformation of the modes of formalisation of knowledge that accompany the fact of narrating our lives, taking into account the relationship with contexts, actors and experiences". (Olano, Cuevas, Perea, et. al., 2020, p.10).

The process of accompaniment and involvement that I have had with the struggle of the Otomí community is based on my identification and sense of belonging to an original people, with a sense of co-responsibility for the shared colonised history. Agnes Heller proposes our own experience as a trigger of feeling, but also of thinking, with an implication that escapes the social norms of conduct (2005). So too in acting, inquiring about responsibility and collaborative epistemic gaze. A naming of ourselves among peoples and from ourselves in order to "promote ourselves collectively" (Cabanillas, 2021) and to dismantle the hegemonic in the generation of knowledge.

My position also identifies with Xóchitl Leyva and Shannon Speed's proposal to carry out co-labour work (2008), as not only is it possible to create knowledge collectively, but I also believe that it is possible to decentralise the idea, in research, of placing oneself as the sole author in the generation of knowledge and, therefore, claiming to have the right over it.

Thus, it is fundamental to place the experiences of women in defense of land and territory as a place of political construction from where processes of political subjectivation are constructed in a community practice with women from the CIG in the diverse struggles that their communities maintain and from their resistances. Furthermore, I propose to re-signify notions and practices of defense of land and territory as an "embodied defense" (Cruz, 2021), which involves emotions, corporeality and subjectivity, above all, opening a gap to go beyond hegemonic conceptions or the world of the one (Cumes, 2020). Instead,

it proposes to expand the senses of land and territory as extensions of our bodies.

The narratives presented here and generated by Otomí women also propose diverse ways of inhabiting and enunciating themselves from "other places", spaces hitherto unheard of. The takeover of the INPI has generated other places of enunciation for women, not only produced by the councillors, but also by other women. One example is the meetings organised by women at the takeover INPI, with the aim of generating links and networks, as they have also organised themselves from their communities, linking up with other struggles, based on a willingness to listen, dialogue and accompany each other. The women's perspective traces experiences that range from unidirectional to multilateral. From dialogues with others, multiple dimensions such as the historical, social and cultural intersect (Fajardo, 2021).

The effect of women's voices, who are at the forefront of the struggles, impacts from their own contexts in a kind of long-term co-learning. For there is a world to be enunciated, when the voice of the people has been silenced, and even more so that of women, who have historically been placed in places of marginalization, simply because they are women, "indigenous" and poor, as the reflections of feminists such as Aída Hernández Castillo, Mercedes Olivera, Mágina Millán and Silvia Marcos, to mention a few, have pointed out and denounced, from activism and decolonising practices.

The process of subjectivation that women councillors go through is both an affirmation and a series of ruptures. The French philosopher Jaques Rancière understands the process of subjectivation as a double identity movement. Thus, it is not only a movement of affirmation of one identity, but also the rejection of another that is imposed (Rancière, 2000). Thus, women from native nations not only claim their identity as spokeswomen or councillors, but also generate a rupture of other identity constructions based on stereotypes and prejudices

anchored in the Mexican state's invention of the "indigenous" as an imposition and homogenous identity. Nor do they seek to assume the identities of "indigenous leaders", which have been phagocytized by the officialist or neoliberal multicultural discourse, but rather from the configuration of subjectivities as "women who struggle".

It is therefore relevant to know and understand these processes of political subjectivation. These subjectivities allow us to understand the forms and means of political organization from the voices of the women of the CIG; in this case, the voice of Maricela Mejía and that of the Otomí community for the right to housing, education, health and work. This emerging organizational form gives us clues to think about the relevance of a movement of struggle and defence of territory "outside the community" of origin and in articulation with other women and other defences of land and territory.

The Otomí community

The Otomí community living in Mexico City is demanding their right to housing, after being displaced by migration from their place of origin in Santiago Mexquititlán, in the central Mexican state of Querétaro. The members of the community left nearly half a century ago^{viii}. The last of this group left twenty years ago. In the beginning they practiced "temporary migration, first the men moved to the city and then the women (Romer, 2003). Lourdes Arizpe notes that, between 1950 and 1990, about ten million inhabitants of original peoples left their places of origin to migrate elsewhere (2015, p. 55). In more recent displacements, the Otomí community is located as part of a complex problem of mobilization of indigenous communities to Mexico City.

Decades have passed since the arrival of the Otomí community in Mexico City and their material conditions have not improved, as these families are still

homeless and, worse still, continue to inhabit the streets, without any guarantee of a solution to their demands from the local government.

The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the conditions of oblivion for the Otomí community. So they decided to take over the INPI on 12 October 2020, as part of the change in the commemoration of that date to stop celebrating the Day of the Race and make room for the Day of Resistance of the original nations. Also, on the 528th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the territories that today make up the Americas, an event that marked the beginning of the history of extermination, annihilation and dispossession, not only of the land, but also of the knowledge and diverse ways of inhabiting the world.

The "indigenous" movements of struggle and resistance throughout *Abya Yala*^{ix} have been a constant feature of the historical colonial process of oppression. The various manifestations of discontent over the "celebration of the 500 years of conquest throughout Abya Yala, in Mexico, the emergence of the EZLN or the "incorporation of the figure of indigenous autonomy in the constitutions", carried out in the year 200 in Ecuador and Bolivia, are part of the processes of vindication of the original peoples, tribes and nations in *Abya Yala* (López and García, 2016).

The various forms of violence exercised by the European invaders marked the life and development of the native peoples. The struggle against territorial dispossession has become a defence of life that symbolizes the relationship between human beings and nature as coexistence without distinction.

In the case of the Otomí community, the defence of territory and what it means in the context of the city becomes a twofold struggle: for a physical territorial space and for recognition as native peoples and the right to inhabit the city without being discriminated against on the basis of their origin.

The Otomi community's representative and councillor is Maricela Mejía, who is also a mother, merchant and artisan. She is now the face of the struggle and demands of the Otomi community in the takeover of the INPI. Her participation has been fundamental in strengthening the struggle of her community and, in this case, with the women, who are being impacted by Maricela's voice, presence and sharing as a councillor of the CIG and representative of the Otomí community.

The force of her words is forceful in her public interventions. At the press conference held by the Otomí community on the day of the INPI takeover, at the gates of the building, Maricela spoke in this way:

"(...) today we went out to take over the INPI (...). It has been 528 years that we, the original peoples, have not been taken into account... every time we go out, every time we have meetings with the government, 'there is already a solution', they say, 'what solution for the peoples? We are still on the streets, we are still living on the streets, enduring the cold, enduring the rain, we don't have a roof, we don't have housing"^x.

Maricela Mejía draws a striking parallel between the situation of the Otomí community and the intervention of the colonial enterprise more than 500 years ago. Thus, the Otomí community has highlighted the asymmetries, racism and institutional discrimination, as well as the literate ways in which power has been imposed on the native nations over a long period of time. On the same day as the takeover of the INPI, Maricela herself explained:

"(...) that is why we decided to take over and we are not going to vacate it until we have a dialogue with Claudia (Sheinbaum) and Adelfo Regino, because they have to respond to the requests regarding housing, (...) we have decided to stay and live here in this space, for as long as it is necessary... until these people sit down to dialogue and negotiate, because we also know how to dialogue, because we also know how to negotiate, but we will do it our way, not their way, because we are fed up with them always looking down on the indigenous or the peoples"^{xi}.

He stresses that from the outset there is a call for dialogue. Above all, that the Otomí community and the women should become interlocutors, that they should be assigned a dialogue status. Although after the occupation there were some negotiation tables with local and federal authorities, so far there has been no agreement to lift the occupation.

After two meetings between the government authorities and the community to lay the groundwork for dialogue and working groups, the authorities not only failed to show up, but also ignored the Otomí community's work proposal. At these roundtables, various issues were proposed, such as health and food, work and justice, education and culture, housing and the right to the city. They also raised issues related to the community of Santiago Mexquititlán and its problems, as well as national problems such as democracy and freedom, mega-projects, mother earth and resistance of the peoples^{xii}.

When the authorities did not show up at the end of November 2020 as agreed, the Otomí community proceeded to burn documents from the "dead archive" of the INPI facilities in the street. These actions are in addition to proposals for solidarity with other struggles, such as: the demand for justice for the 43 students from Ayotzinapa who have been disappeared by the state, for a halt to megaprojects in southern Mexico, justice for Samir Flores, a defender of the territory murdered in Morelos, among other demands. Likewise, the Otomí community has been denouncing tourism exploitation projects and water grabbing in their own community of origin, in Santiago Mexquititlán, in the state of Querétaro, since they took over the INPI. These demands and demands remain unresolved and unheeded by the government.

Anger at the disdain and neglect of the authorities is present, as Maricela points out, but she also warns that dialogue should be conducted in her own way and not in the way of those in power. In a clear break with the colonial tutelage

practices of state power, which eliminates other forms of meaning and enunciation.

The seizure of the institute by the Otomí community means inhabiting political places, especially for women, who are configuring unprecedented places of enunciation, in articulation with movements such as the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).

In Mexico, political proposals from social movements such as the EZLN and the CNI-CIG are putting forward proposals for autonomy and their own forms of government. This is made clear in the text of the communiqué "*¡And shuddered!, report from the epicentre...*", which appeared as an epigraph in the call for the Constitutive Assembly of the CIG in May 2017, stating:

"(...) That is, have no doubt, we are going for everything, because we know that we have before us perhaps the last opportunity as indigenous peoples and as Mexican society to peacefully and radically change our own forms of government, making dignity the epicentre of a new world" (CNI, 2017).

Thus, the formation of the CIG, from the point of view of women, who have been the most visible within this Indigenous Governing Council, proposes forms and practices of community exchange, but they are also modifying their dynamics within their community. They are redefining roles, practices and spaces that were inhabited exclusively by men, as part of "custom", but also as part of a patriarchal, capitalist, colonialist and extractivist system.

The struggle of women maintains a continuity of ancestral struggles, as Adriana Guzmán rightly states from the political stance of community feminism, in the face of the history of structural oppression as a colonialist continuity (2016). Thus, those excluded, subalternised and impoverished women are included, they recognise themselves through their difference, they rename themselves within a

horizontal dialogue and mutual recognition in the encounters and sharing that they themselves organize together with their communities of origin.

Since the emergence of the CIG, a dialogue of experiences of struggles and forms of organization in the defence of land and territory^{xiii} has been generated between councilwomen, women from the CNI and the EZLN, and women from other geographies and contexts. In these dialogues, many women who belong to indigenous nations or peoples have participated, listening and learning about their organizational forms, strategies of struggle and their strength to walk, propose and rebuild from different scales, ranging from the community to generate impacts at the national and international level. One example is the echo of the Zapatista women's struggle in the women of Kurdistan. This was expressed by Melike Yasar^{xiv}, in a dialogue with the women of the CIG and women in resistance:

Our movement, my generation, we grew up with the struggle of these indigenous people of Latin America and Mexico. It always had a hope and an example for us and one of the aspects of our trainings was always the struggles of the indigenous people in their communities and their self-organisation which is not so visible in the Middle East or in the Western world. But, we felt responsible to make this struggle known as well (Yasar, 2019).

The women who make up the CIG are undoubtedly bearers of the teachings of Zapatista women and their actions within the Zapatista movement for more than thirty years. The women of the CIG, as generators of new mechanisms for the defense of the territory, are at the same time configuring new processes of political subjectivation, by constructing their identities as representatives of their communities and being recognised for their political participation in the defense of the territory.

While Maricela Mejía, as a CIG councillor, is walking together with a social movement with a long history of struggle, which picks up echoes of the

Zapatista struggle, she also tries to challenge others by launching a message to her community environment, but also to other women and men from native peoples, in the following way:

But what about when they want your votes, when they run for office... they even go with trucks to our towns for us... make do with your food (...) Here your vote is over and the agreement is over with me, but you go to ask the government for something and the government simply closes the door on you and we are fed up with that. That is why today we decided to take this Institute and we are not going to leave it, comrades, and we ask for the support of our comrades to show solidarity and to come and accompany us, now we are asking the people to wake up... what else should we lose or what else does the government need to take from us?^{xv}.

Maricela points out the need for support and collective work. A proposal for political action that also emanates from CIG as an invitation to confront capitalism and patriarchy, generators of the problems that indigenous peoples are experiencing today.

In 2017, before the National Electoral Institute, as part of her registration to seek an independent candidacy for the presidential election, María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, "Marichuy", spokesperson for the CIG said:

The people are putting forward this proposal and that is why we want to walk like the indigenous peoples, together with all of you with this proposal, this is the only way we are going to move forward. Also, the indigenous peoples cannot do it alone, that is why we are asking for the support of the workers in the countryside and in the city, together we have to make an effort to move forward and help our communities, neighbourhoods, colonies, towns, everyone, we have to join forces, together with the indigenous peoples, they are going to show us how we have to move forward^{xvi}.

An invitation to political action and to the organisation of various sectors of the population that are being marginalised, excluded, exploited at work and whose

rights and needs are being violated, a structural violence that goes beyond the "indigenous" communities and extends to various social sectors.

It should be noted that the women of the CIG have not been exempt from having to deal with internal processes regarding the right to political participation. For her part, Maricela Mejía, when she was elected councillor after a long process^{xvii}, had to prove herself to her own community and occupying a place alongside men. On taking office as a councillor, she shares her experience of the reaction of her fellow community members in this way:

(...) to arrive and say look, mate, this goes here, that goes there, but I said, this is the right thing to do, isn't it? And we put it to the test and then that cost a lot to the colleagues with whom we worked together, obviously they realised or said how a person, an uneducated woman, a woman without much schooling, but I always come from that mentality of saying that to be someone or to have a position, you don't need to have studied, what you need to have is awareness, to see what your people, your people really need^{xviii}.

At the press conference on the day of the INPI takeover, Maricela also pointed out that:

Now they are also going to sue us because we are taking away their space just for a little while, because we will only be here for a little while, we are not going to stay here, we don't like this space, we don't like this space because we want our space, we demand our space with electricity and water... education, we are demanding education for ourselves, respect as women, respect for our children, for our youth, for our adults.

Maricela's words show that the neo-indigenist institution is not a space for the communities, no matter how much publicity and rhetorical resources the government of the "Fourth Transformation" uses. One example was the presidential inauguration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2018, which began with a kind of "political ritual" in which he was handed the baton, the symbol of authority for the indigenous peoples, apparently handed over by the

68 ethnic groups of Mexico (Bonilla, 2018). Currently, many peoples are defending their territories from the megaprojects imposed by López Obrador.

For the INPI, as an institutional dimension of the administration of cultural difference, is the reproducer of the literate culture imposed on the original nations. Because inside it are thousands of documents: forms with requirements for access to social assistance programmes and official documents to endorse so-called “mega-projects of death” that were developed at desks in offices. It is part of the legal institutionality that legitimizes dispossession and violence.

Therefore, the seizure of the INPI was also an act of cracking the indigenist narrative that has placed indigenous peoples in a paternalistic dynamic, in which the Mexican state has dictated the ways and means based on developmentalist and integrationist plans (González, 2020). Resignifying spaces means giving political participation other readings based on enunciative, semiotic and meaningful irruptions. By taking over the building, it was visually inscribed and endowed with other meanings as a space charged with significant elements, of denunciation, of justice, from where movements of struggle and resistance intersect, with diverse representations and elements demanded by the original peoples. The murals stand out: of the Zapatista comandanta Ramona, the one of Ayotzinapa for the 43, the one of the Lele doll, representative of the Otomí people, and also the one symbolising the rejection of the "Mayan Train".

The presence of women, at the forefront of struggles connected to other women and communities, bursts into the political arena and breaks with the official narrative of identity politics that include and exclude (Hernández, 2008), as "indigenous" women, designated to occupy "domestic" and at the same time folklorized spaces, in the history of domination of the body and knowledge of women from native peoples (Navarro, 2013).

Therefore, the movement that women belonging to indigenous peoples and nations is generating is part of a political proposal based on social construction. In this context, it highlights the importance of generating proposals that are configured from the practice and processes of construction of subjectivities. Together with the women of her community, Maricela Mejía is going through a process of action based on the takeover of the INPI, as two contrasting moments: before and after the takeover.

Otomí women are the ones who have been in dialogue with the government representatives. A communication commission *is* at the forefront. These women are mothers, shopkeepers, embroiderers and language speakers who have experienced various forms of violence at the hands of the police and various government institutions. They are the ones who stand up to power, take the microphone and express their anger and rage from their accumulated feelings.

In the course of my coexistence and accompaniment with Otomí women, I have become aware of their demands, from a historically marginalized condition, from which I also identify myself. Some of these women have shared their feelings with me since the occupation of the INPI. Joaquina, on one occasion, told me the following: "when I am talking, they ask me to shut up, but I continue because I have a lot of courage and I tell them, yes, you have had enough, but I haven't"^{xix}. Margarita, a woman with a lot of accumulated anger due to her experience of discrimination, also expressed her feelings during the course of this meeting: "we women have taken the blindfold off our eyes and we are here to fight as much as we can"^{xx}. These expressions express a state of emotions, their experiences lived and contained for a long time, but also as women with political participation in demanding their community demands.

Dimensions and approach to the processes of political subjectivation

The women of the CIG as political subjects seek to change a history of oblivion through their participation in various struggles: this act, in itself, represents a transcendent change of action as indigenous peoples and as women, who suffer the greatest backwardness.

According to María Cristina Martínez and Juliana Cubides, the relationship between the subject and politics has to be viewed in a temporal and spatial context, within a social-historical relationship (2012, p.170). In the idea of a dynamic relationship between the subject and politics, the possibility arises of processes of subjectivity that account for moments, considered as "changing categories", as a possibility of deconstruction/construction of other ways of doing politics that are not imposed or individualized but collective (2012).

This perspective makes a lot of sense in the work of indigenous peoples, who historically remain in resistance, proposing forms that they have inhabited immemorially, while at the same time facing constant situations of dispossession, denial of rights and of recognition and respect for their ways of life.

As part of the CIG and of a political proposal of common construction, Maricela Mejía confronts, from her own process of subjectivity, alternative ways of acting in the struggle for territory and, in this case, for housing as a basic right of indigenous peoples in Mexico City. Part of the process of struggle that Maricela is carrying out with the Otomí community can be identified in two fundamental dimensions: the first, anchored in the roots of their territory, history, memory, clothing and mother tongue, as identities that accompany and underpin processes of defence, struggle and resistance; the second, in the experience of life in the city, the invisibilisation, discrimination and exclusion of the right to inhabit Mexico City.

For Maricela, arriving in the city reaffirmed her feeling for her place of origin, speaking her language and wearing her clothes without suffering discrimination, in an attempt to continue with a way of life that the city does not allow. These were the first experiences that triggered some actions that were unveiled in her political work based on her own reflection and experience.

Now, as a councillor, in the context of her political action, she publicly shows herself with a Zapatista doll, which she herself made and which is different from the dolls that the Otomí traditionally make as an economic means of income. This doll has become the revolutionary doll and is called Comandanta Ramona, in honour of the Zapatista comandanta, one of the legendary women of the Zapatista National Liberation Movement. Maricela's clothing also has a different approach, since by tradition Otomí women wear white skirts, she has changed it for black, just like her doll, which is complemented by the use of a red blouse. Although this visual way of showing herself has been a decision taken by herself, her work is and has always been collective, however, we can identify within the collective action, personal processes of decision making, which could be happening at the same time as other women in their respective communities within their processes of struggle.

Among these processes mentioned is the exchange of experiences that, as women belonging to the CIG, they have had outside their communities, that is, in the meetings convened by both Zapatista women and CNI women^{xxi}. In these meetings, they have exchanged knowledge through listening, dialogue and reflection as part of their strategies for the defence of land and territory. These experiences are finally taken back to their communities and shared with women and men, a practice that reinforces the communal sense of "walking together", as the women of the CIG have rightly mentioned.

Maricela's coexistence with women from diverse geographies and struggles led her to experiences of sharing, participation and exchange among them. These

experiences in themselves generate and reinforce a sense of community, coming together among women, talking about their situations, feeling with others, crying, singing, laughing, getting angry, expressing themselves, not keeping quiet, organising themselves. In addition, they identify the common, the dispossessions, the impositions and the attacks on internal forms of organisation and autonomy in order to act together or in community as part of a political stance and alternative proposal to the state (Navarro, 2013).

I have known Maricela Mejía since 2017 and since then, I have followed and accompanied her process of struggle in various ways: in meetings convened by Zapatista women and the CNI-CIG, between dialogues and mutual learning. I see her experience as part of a process of empowerment comes from the different places where she lives, as an Otomí woman in the struggle for housing and as a councillor.

The exchange that Maricela has had with other women and other struggles has been fundamental, not only as part of a collective political exercise, but also as women in need of coming together, getting to know each other, listening to each other and accompanying each other. Hence, the sense of collectivity and the generation of collectives of women who meet in other spaces outside their communities, serves as a means to generate collective action, but also as a space for reflection from their places, from their voices and community contexts.

The processes of organization and generation of community networks, the practice of assemblies, the exchange with other struggles and other women, provide them and their communities with new tools for the defence of the territory and create political subjectivities that the women councillors identify from each of their struggles. These processes also imply an in-depth approach to the problems and, therefore, to the damage caused to their territories, to their ways of inhabiting, that is to say, in the face of dispossession, profound forms of territorial defence are established.

The sense of the community is politicized, therefore, it acquires other meanings. political spaces are created or renewed. The generation of a democratic practice becomes effective locally, but it has an impact on the creation of autonomy, self-determination and its own forms of governance, as a sign of the creation of political subjectivities that become alternative practices and proposals to the state.

The construction of the social and also of the political from the practices of women like Maricela, who take the floor and speak out against the exclusionary politics that makes struggles and demands invisible and contributes to the transformation of the marginalised and forgotten conditions of the original peoples. They not only organize themselves, defend their territory and their rights, but also propose ways of caring for and protecting life that, of course, oppose capitalist, extractivist and dispossessive policies.

On the contrary, new subjectivities are reconfigured as they act in defense of land and territory, as they organize themselves and experience changing processes. In a constant change that transforms or adjusts their being and becoming in specific times and spaces, but which maintains a historical and social background of struggle. The defense of territory is not something new, nor is the awareness of damage, but rather, as forms that are being updated (Navarro, 2013), therefore, the strategies of defence and confrontation are changing, from other places, some even previously uninhabited, such as the struggle of the EZLN.

We affirm then that it is possible to rethink and assume politics from other places, other referents and other subjects endowed with autonomy, creativity and with bets for other social orders to be built. Political subjectivities that are being reconfigured from other matrices of thought and action and that seek scenarios of action that provoke and activate the necessary powers to act as such (Martínez, Cubides, 2012, p.174).

It is possible, therefore, to think about the political and social transformation of the historical condition that indigenous peoples have lived through from the demands for rights, but also from the practice of autonomy.

The social movements of struggle and resistance such as the EZLN, CNI and now the CIG have been triggers for the demands and demands of the diversity of indigenous peoples in Mexico. Thus, the Otomí community and its demand for housing is not reduced to a single demand and right, but rather to a proposal for change and social and historical transformation based on the takeover of an official institution in order to be made visible and heard.

Notes

ⁱ This community is part of the original people whose self-designation is *ñhöñhö*, but here the term Otomí is used again, recognising that it is not the self-descriptive expression, but it is the one that is recognised in institutional and public spheres. This community is officially recognised as Otomí, a term in Náhuatl. The community is made up of around 100 families living in two central neighbourhoods in Mexico City, Juárez and Roma. It occupies three properties located at Guanajuato 200 and Zacatecas 74, in the Roma neighbourhood. In Colonia Juárez, Roma 18 (until a few days ago these families moved to the INPI taken). Until the November 2017 earthquake, the Otomí community lived in the three centrally located properties, which were not equipped for housing. One of these buildings, Roma 18, belonged to the Spanish Embassy during the time of the Spanish Republic (1931 to 1936) and until the end of the civil war. This building was practically in ruins and without drinking water when this community lived in it after the 1985 earthquake. Since then, the *ñhöñhö* community has sheltered it, despite the conditions in which it was found. Since the 2017 eviction, the community has been living in tents and camping tents on the pavements and streets in the aforementioned neighbourhoods.

ⁱⁱ Maricela Mejía is a councillor of the Indigenous Council of Government (CIG) formed in 2017, which is linked to other processes of struggle, such as the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).

ⁱⁱⁱ The National Indigenist Institute (INI) was created in 1948 in the so-called "post-revolutionary" period (Korsbaek, Sámano, 2007) promoting welfare and paternalism towards the original peoples of Mexico. It has since been renamed in three different ways, yet its narrative ignores the real needs of indigenous peoples today. Women and men belonging to indigenous peoples have been at the head of this institution, a tokenist strategy that has in no way guaranteed that the government would solve any real problems of indigenous peoples.

^{iv} El CNI se formó en 1996 y concentra más de cuarenta pueblos originarios de México para el fortalecimiento de sus formas de organización, decisión política y formas de autonomías. [The CNI was formed in 1996 and brings together more than forty native peoples of Mexico to strengthen their forms of organization, political decision and forms of autonomy.]

<https://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/que-es-el-cni/>

^v Subsequently, nearly 200 councillors were elected, one woman and one man for each cultural group, as well as a spokesperson, María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, "Marichuy".

<http://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/concejo-indigena-de-gobierno/>, accessed on 12/06/2021.

^{vi} Personal interview with María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, conducted by Florina Mendoza on 07 March 2021, INPI, Mexico City.

^{vii} I place the term "indigenous" in inverted commas in an attempt to strip it of an imposed, homogenised assignment, over and above the diverse forms of autonomy from the 68 languages existing in Mexico.

^{viii} Field notes during dialogues with government authorities at the INPI intake, October 2020.

^{ix} *Abya Yala* is the term used by the original kuna people of Colombia and Panamá, meaning: mature land, living land, flourishing land (Carrera and Ruíz, 2016).

^x INPI takeover field notes, press conference: Otomí indigenous community reports on the takeover of INPI facilities, 12 October 2020, Mexico City.

^{xi} Field notes taken from INPI, 12 October 2020, Mexico City.

^{xii} Communiqué read by Otomí women on 19 November 2020. Regeneración Radio

<https://www.facebook.com/142987045749329/videos/1114005045685369>, accessed on 13/06/2020.

^{xiii} Here I place the term "land and territory" in this way: "land" as the place where we dwell in common, and "territory" as the place inhabited by native peoples, tribes and nations, from their various senses of appropriation and meaning. However, I will use "defence of territory" in the way it is referred to by the women councillors above.

^{xiv} Conversation: The Kurdistan Women's Revolution and Mexico, held in Cuernavaca Morelos, Mexico, 23 September 2019. Melike Yasar, representative of the Kurdistan Women's Movement for Latin America and member of the Kurdistan National Congress.

^{xv} Field notes on the INPI takeover, Otomí community press conference to report on the INPI takeover, 12 October 2019, Mexico City.

^{xvi} María de Jesús Patricio Martínez in her registration at the National Electoral Institute in 2017. Subversiones, Autonomous Agency of Communication.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJeS5qLgoIU>, accessed on 13/07/2021

^{xvii} Before the Indigenous Council of Government was formed, I had the opportunity to listen to one of the women proposed by her community for councillor, who commented that some men refused to have their communities represented by women, because according to them, women were "not capable". Notes from the Seminario permanente Marxismo y Feminismo, CNTE (Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, 2018), Mexico City.

^{xviii} Interview with Maricela Mejía by Florina Mendoza, Chiapas, 29 December 2019.

^{xix} Personal interview with Joaquina by Florina Mendoza at INPI, November 2019, Mexico City.

^{xx} Forum held by the women at the takeover of INPI. *La palabra de las mujeres otomí: rendirse no existe en lengua verdadera*, [The word of the Otomí women: surrender does not exist in the true language] 15 October 2020, Mexico City. Regeneración Radio.

<https://www.facebook.com/142987045749329/videos/820204922080849>, accessed on 15/10/2019.

^{xxi} Meetings convened by women of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. First International Political, Artistic, Sporting and Cultural Meeting of Women in Struggle, held from 8 to 10 March 2018. The Second International Meeting of Women in Struggle, held from 27-29 December 2019. Information about these meetings can be found at the following link:

<http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2018/03/10/palabras-de-las-mujeres-zapatistas-en-la-clausura-del-primero-encuentro-internacional/>

Maricela has also attended the First National Meeting of Women of the CNI-CIG, held on 28 and 29 July 2018; the Second National Meeting of Women of the CNI-CIG, held on 27 and 28 July 2019 and

the Third National Meeting of Women of the CNI-CIG, held on 6 and 7 March 2021. The information is available at the following link: <https://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/2018/07/30/declaratoria-final-del-primer-encuentro-nacional-de-mujeres-del-cni-y-el-cig/>

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