

**FIRST INDIGENOUS WOMEN SUMMIT OF THE
AMERICAS**

Background Paper on

***GENDER
FROM THE INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE¹***

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I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, talking about gender is almost ordinary, if not obligatory, since this concept has been adopted in worldwide speech by women movements and development institutions. If we bear in mind that the total indigenous population of America and the Caribbean is estimated in approx. 45-50 million women and men, ten per cent of the total population of the region, and that Indigenous Peoples represent most part of the poorest group in Latin America, particularly indigenous women who have more difficulties in escaping from poverty conditioned by multiple forms of exclusion¹ and institutionalized racism, it is essential to analyze this concept's dimension from a new perspective: the indigenous women's viewpoint.

Evidently, to analyze gender relationships, in addition to considering the levels of political, economic, social and cultural life, we should consider the fact of belonging to excluded, impoverished sections, the ethnic and racial origin, age, geographical location, and the role played by people in the different stages of their lives. For indigenous women, the gender category not only means power relationships between men and women, although it is important to ensure equity and balance, but also an approach that integrates plurality and diversity, based on the exercise of their peoples' individual and collective rights.

When dealing with the complex subject of indigenous women and gender relationships in Indigenous Peoples it is necessary to consider the great cultural diversity of Indigenous Peoples and accept that generalizations about them have great limitations that should be supplemented with deep ethnographic studies.²

In general terms, there is a perception that "gender", from the indigenous women's viewpoint attempts to reestablish a balance and Duality relationship between men and women in their communities. This vision persists in the collective memory of Indigenous Peoples, as reflected by the following "mapuche" quotation: "*Old lady of heaven, old man of heaven, young boy high up in heaven, young girl of the heights, that tell us about a being arising from their power to be old and wise and have the strength of the young in their flowing of both sexes*".³

In fact, indigenous women point out repeatedly that "*before the Spanish invasion, women were considered to have the same rights and workload as men*".⁴

When they speak about the current situation they say the following: "*today we can see in our communities the same ill treatment of women than in the rest of Peru... but this situation does not reflect our true nature and it is also a dangerous road... Now, thanks to our organizations and the experiences we have had we realize how much we have been humiliated and cheated... Now that we are recovering the pride to be who we are, we cannot let them cheat us again.... Chauvinism, ill treatment, lack of respect and marginalization of indigenous women constitute a new cultural invasion which damages us, and that our men accept because they are narrow minded and are ashamed of showing our reality, which is much more honorable.*"⁵

The following document deals with the meaning of gender, based on terms used worldwide until obtaining a personal view thereof, how it is expressed in the different socialization areas, analyzing the elements that have determined its experience, the most conflicting and debated aspects, the perception of the different points of view of external approaches to the subject and the profile of an Plan of Action.

II. BACKGROUND

With the Spanish Conquest followed by the corresponding Spanish Colonization, during the apogee of Rationalism and Enlightenment, the sustainable world of a relative and sensitive balance was disjointed all over the continent, and another vision of nature, of the relationship between human beings and of these with nature was imposed. Then, the bases of modernity were set up.⁶

The Conquest and Colonization process to which Indigenous Peoples have been exposed took away the women's prestige and power.⁷ They knew how to cure and served as intermediaries between spirits and human beings, among other things. However, the breakage of the community organization and the expropriation of their lands reduced the security they had. Indigenous Peoples were integrated by force to new forms of social organization and their territories, natural resources, political and administrative systems were and are still being taken away from them. On these ruins, dominant development models were constructed, based on lack of knowledge and abuse of individual and collective rights. In fact, even today in most of the available ethnographic studies about Indigenous Peoples, the indigenous woman continues to be the great invisible and absent character.

National States and their Constitutional Order were established and organized based on the "*legal equality*" principle, which has not recognized differences; on the contrary, it has promoted the ideal of homogeneity. As from 1940, the governments of the Americas adopted the First International Agreement about Indigenous Peoples, the Patzcuaro Convention, which would determine as from this date the indigenous, integrationist and assimilation policies, which the Governments and Institutions of the Region have been applying. These policies were based on the concept of pinpointing ethnic diversity as a problem, which would only be solved through homogenization.

Indigenous Peoples obtained Constitutional recognition of their collective identity in some countries; they obtained the approval of the 169 Agreement of the ILO, which states that even though they are Peoples they still do not have the right of Self Determination, thus violating Section 1 of the International Agreements.⁸

Nevertheless, a model has been imposed that has maintained a generalized policy of structural racism that somehow explains the total absence of a responsibility sense by other sectors towards the racism phenomena and racial discrimination. Privileges are well-structured and settled between racial, gender and age groups and are aimed at their reproduction and extension.

Exclusion and poverty are not the fundamental problems, but rather the fact that others continue to decide in the name of Indigenous Peoples how these problems should be solved. The worst thing is not social exclusion itself, but the fact that the Indigenous Peoples even when they do have their own participation systems and spaces, they are not respected and accepted with their collective identity in areas outside their communities.

Within this framework, mostly indigenous women face this situation of institutionalized racism – due to their condition of women and indigenous- in different manners and in all places, such as in family relationships, the community, when they go to the market, in the city, at school, at health care centers, at the office, etc. etc.

Meanwhile, as from the 70's, the so-called *women's studies* were replaced by the *gender studies*. Cultural diversity of attributes interpreted as male and female could no longer be captured as the man versus woman opposition or nature versus culture, they had to be replaced by a differentiated

thought. The search for a category that would bring together the very different empirically proved conditions of inequality between women and men made it necessary to create a new concept: gender.⁹

III. STATUS OF ART: FROM THE UNIVERSAL CONCEPT TO FEMALE ETHNIC IDENTITY

3.1 A conceptual reflection

The concepts of self-esteem, gender focus, equity or gender itself are nowadays universally used concepts, as a result of the globalization process, the application of which goes beyond the different sections of social life, from the analysis of relationships between people in the private area to the area of social and economic relationships, political processes and those of nation development. The question is whether, as stated by some authors, these concepts *“not only have remained in the vocabulary of institutions, politicians or contemporary intellectuals, but also have become the ordinary vocabulary in the speeches of Indigenous Peoples.”*¹⁰

According to an IADB report about the results of the Consultation Workshops to indigenous women in Guatemala, Panama, Peru and Bolivia, it is shocking to learn that all the women consulted agree on the fact that they are less valuable than men within their culture, and that their contributions, skills and knowledge suffer from an undermining process within their own indigenous cultures. However, the worst thing is that they themselves have internalized this “devaluation” and the little value of their contribution.

This is commonly known as self-esteem which, although it is a new concept for Indigenous Peoples, its use from a conception of the world is not new; self-esteem means valuing and knowing oneself, *“recognizing myself as a woman, as a person, as somebody who is valuable, has many capabilities, and wishes to be happy as a principle of life and struggle”*¹¹. Thus, self-esteem becomes the search for global happiness and freedom, which means *“to have an integral health, to be in peace with myself, without injustices around me and without damaging others.”*¹²

In other words, it is *“how I see myself, what I believe of myself, how I think of and how much I love myself”*¹³ arising from *“the relationship with myself, with my community, my family and my body”*¹⁴. These four elements measure the self-esteem degree and are closely related to self-concept, self-efficiency and self-reference.

The self-esteem concept from the indigenous vision is closely related to ethnic identity, as it also refers to *“knowing where I come from, what culture I belong to, what is my origin, identifying myself”*¹⁵. This is an element, among others, that has enabled us *“still to be ourselves today”*.¹⁶

Another new vocabulary concept, which is still difficult to understand by Indigenous Peoples from a western perspective, is that of gender focus, *“a conceptual operating instrument that enables us to look at reality from a new perspective that goes beyond the biological explanation of differences between sexes and concentrates on pinpointing cultural, historical, social, and economic factors, among others, that distinguish men from women and generate inequality conditions and positions between them so as to participate efficiently in their change”*.¹⁷

Applying this concept entails, from the indigenous women’s viewpoint, *“starting from the respect and appreciation of the other, mutual respect; rather than the supremacy of one over the other”*¹⁸,

which implies “*respecting the differences of others and not damaging them*”¹⁹, as “*I cannot harm others without knowing that I am affecting myself*”²⁰

The practice of gender focus is understood as “*a respectful, true, equitable, balanced, relationship –which for western societies would be equity- , a harmonious relationship in which men and women have opportunities, without purporting an additional load to women, but a facilitating element. Only in this way we will be able to feel fine spiritually, with human beings, the earth, heaven and other natural elements that give us oxygen*”.²¹

Talking about gender focus entails going back to the concept of Duality as treated from the indigenous vision of the world, according to which “*everything in the universe is ruled in terms of Duality, heaven and earth, happiness and sadness, day and night and how they supplement each other: one cannot be without the other. If we had ten days of sun only we would die, we would not bear it. Everything is ruled in terms of Duality, undoubtedly, men and women.*”²²

“*The center is between one end and the other. The ends of the scale, as well as its center are not absolute qualities, they depend on many factors, so they are relative, variable concepts, not exact*”.²³ In this way we can understand Duality between men and women as “*the supplementation between them, as between human beings and nature; the relationship between these two elements and their interaction.*”²⁴

Duality is then, something that “*is lived, it occurs*”²⁵ (...). *We are taught this spiritually and live it in ceremonies, we live it when we see families in which men and women, fathers and mothers make decisions*²⁶ (...) *From the beginning, in a family in which one is born, raised and entertained there is a father, a mother and one is always living with grandparents, grandmothers, sisters and brothers...*” I can see this in far away communities. In fact, “*you always start from the father or mother because they are the closest family members, but it is actually a whole. I am talking about the earth, heaven, the trees, the sun and the four elements, nature, everything; it is summarized in only one word*”.²⁷ It is balance at its utmost expression.

Even though, according to some indigenous voices, “*suddenly (...) there is like a certain rupture or degradation, something that affects, that disintegrates a bit both parts, men and women, like they cannot be free. (...) That is what is being currently questioned: something that makes us stop to check where that capacity is lost, that essence of Duality, and suddenly that part begins to lose its balance. That is why several things fail in society.*”²⁸

The adoption of this posture stems from the idea that Duality today, “*is questionable, it is a big question mark, because as a theory it exists in our cosmovision and in our habits, but in practice many situations are observed where only men decide*”²⁹ (...) “*The picture is not totally pessimistic, there are many good things, but the media, schools and several other elements have contributed to the staggering of the principle of Duality*”³⁰. Starting from this base, an auto-critical revision is conceived, in which a Revisionist Movement could be recognized within the framework of an Indigenous Political Posture.

It is not the denial of the Duality concept, but the conviction that its meaning is that “*duality is the ideal, it is what things should be like, although there is a long way between what things are and what they should be*”.³¹ It is something “*that should be checked, because each day there are minor aggressions, but they are inflicted upon women, however they are not so strong because authorities intervene.*”³² Even though there is always the hope that “*duality can be part of the relationships that many women establish and that they can be strengthened*”.³³

The adoption of this posture implies a two way process in which the traditional and the modern merge, especially with the new generations as protagonists: *“although we started the process of recovering our roots, as young women today, we are in the search of new paradigms. We want to start new relationships, to establish new contacts, to know that communication and dialogue are important problem solving means, as long as the other person also wants them to be.”*³⁴

As it is apparent in the Duality concept, the Revisionist or Critical Movement also has its pole: in this case, a Conservative Movement framed within a Culturalist Posture. In this sense,³⁵ it could be said that looking at gender relations within the Indigenous Populations is still not frequently done, due to several political, ideological and methodological obstacles. Because of the violent historical processes of colonization, independence and the undermining of the Indigenous Populations’ culture, the protection of the value, the right to differentiation and self-affirmation and the safeguard of Indigenous values has been considered the first priority.

From this starting point³⁶, two movements have emerged that avoid giving indigenous cultures a critical look: one is made up by some indigenous leaders, who, urged by the need to self-affirm and revalue their own culture and the Indigenous Populations against the dominating culture, resist acknowledging or expressing publicly, at least to the non-indigenous, the inequalities and other forms of discrimination towards women within their own cultures. The other movement is made up by those political and academic sectors that want to protect indigenous cultures from the negative changes imposed by dominating cultures.

In spite of this, all the exposed postures share the idea that Duality *“is a very important element in our cosmovision, it is important that Duality exists from spirituality since that is the central axis of our lives and as long as you are fine spiritually, everything else will follow that line.”*³⁷

Still, external postures should be added to the internal ones. Within the indigenous boundaries, a generalized feeling that the issue of complementarity is very questioned for the non-indigenous society: *“we currently find that not only women, but society as a whole has criticized and questioned complementarity in the sense that that women are discriminated by men. The work done by women at home is seen as ‘savagery’ and as an expression of chauvinism, seen from the outside. But this same situation, seen from within the same culture, is ok, it is lived peacefully and in harmony and there is nothing to be scared about, because both men and women are simply fulfilling the roles that are accepted by the community and that constitute part of the social model. On the contrary, community members are scared when projects, institutions or other persons (men or women) impose, from the outside, thoughts and roles different from those that rule in the community.”*³⁸

And reaching the central point of the debate, the general concept of Gender is universally treated *“as a dynamic category that allows the analysis of the male-female, male-male, female-female relationships”*³⁹, with reference *“to the differences and the socially established relationships between men and women that vary by situation and context”*⁴⁰, and more specifically to the *“group of social, economic, political, cultural, psychological and juridical characteristics and norms assigned differentially to each gender.”*⁴¹

Even though from the indigenous women’s view the consensus is that the relation between this group of characteristics and social norms is *“horizontal and supplementary”*⁴² where the relationship’s intrinsic character prevails, *“since one could not exist without the other”*⁴³, the opinions differ with the attempt to build a pyramidal relation based on the degree of influence of each one of them in the creation of gender relationships.

Always taking as a reference the concept of gender defined by author Marcela Lagarde, a first movement presents the social, economic, political and cultural aspects as the ones with the greater

influence, with an equal weight, pointing that the rest can be derived from these, even though the social aspect could be highlighted by implying “economy, well-being, discomfort...”⁴⁴ And, “regardless of what population we belong to, we always establish social relationships, we start from the point that we socialize first: when you start to socialize, you start to see the incidence that the cultural aspect has. If you already passed these two steps, the others begin”.⁴⁵

A second movement prioritizes the religious issue, presumably integrated with the social aspect, as one of the most determining characteristics and norms in the establishment of the gender concept: “to establish the socially assigned gender roles, that construction you get for being a man, or for being a woman, religion is greatly conditioning.”⁴⁶

The juridical situation would be the second step: “when laws oppress you as a woman, when they deny you access to decision processes, when they do not give you access to be protected, when they deny you of a framework within which you feel as a human being, with rights and duties, but not as citizen of a different category, then that also contributes to make you unimportant to the State.”⁴⁷

The third step would be the economic situation in the sense that “you are what you are worth and we, women, do not have access to money.”⁴⁸ The political situation would occupy the following place “since power has definitely something to do with all of this, even if we do not want it to. Even if we want power to be assigned by representatively, we find ourselves with party politics, because politics understood in its widest concept is a very different thing.”⁴⁹

Cultural characteristics and norms appear in the fifth place: “even though in theory there are other cultural values that block you, that tell you that you should be this way, women have to be at home cooking, preparing the husband’s food when the husband is in the fields... if you break this parameter you are not as indigenous as you should be.”⁵⁰

In this sense, we find that “the social conditioning, the social mandates, in terms that by social mandate women must always be silent and agree with everything men say, the fact that women can only be seen as sexual objects because that is what they were born for, naturally they procreate, therefore that is their sole function.”⁵¹

We would follow with the psychological aspect, in the sense that “the relationship with what surrounds you creates those psychological traumas, those psychological conditions that you can not overcome because it is not society, it is not you family, but it is you who limits yourself.”⁵² Up to a certain point “I can manage the psychological aspect, that is, if I say that this affected me, then it did and if I say it did not, then it did not affect me. Now, the rest, I can not manage, because that is not part of our own being.”⁵³

Nevertheless, for a third movement, the cultural characteristics and norms are the predominant ones, intimately attached to the psychological ones, and even though both dispute the first position, they are followed by the social aspect, from which the political, juridical, and other aspects are derived.

For those who the cultural aspect is determining, “what happens is that there is an interrelation, it depends on the place where one person is born and what surrounds that person and that is what creates everything. The cultural environment will outline the future psychological aspect, it is not separated from the other, because if you are born in a community and you are raced in it you are going to think and derive your personality according to that..”⁵⁴

For those who consider that it is the psychological factor, they highlight the close “*relationship of this concept with auto valorization, with how I identify myself as a person,*”⁵⁵ and with the cultural factor since “*according to that one adopts certain roles.*”⁵⁶

Gender⁵⁷ is, therefore, a constitutive element of social relationships as relationships of power, manifested in very wide levels or dimensions:

1. In cultural symbols, available in different representative forms, amongst which the myths.
2. In normative conceptions, such as the interpretation of the meaning of symbols, in religious systems, *spiritual*, scientific, legal and political.
3. In political stances and in reference to institutions and social organizations.
4. In subjective identity⁵⁸
5. In social practices, that constitute gender relationships, particularly the division of labor
6. In the historicity of the bodies and in their non-static understanding
7. In various forms of domination and power mechanisms⁵⁹
8. In exchange mechanisms
9. In prestige hierarchies constantly in dispute
10. In the Ethno-linguistic Hierarchy, that implies the subordination of certain languages with respect to others as a result of complicated social and historical processes.
11. In systems of rules⁶⁰

In each culture all these dimensions function together as a system. Therefore it is also talked about *gender systems*:

*"A gender system is a group of elements that includes forms and patterns of social relationships, practices associated to daily social life, symbols, identities, garments, ornaments and body treatment, beliefs and arguments, common senses and other various elements that are hold together thanks to a weak gravitational force, and that, directly or indirectly make reference to a culturally specific way to register and understand the similarities and differences between recognized genders: that is, in most human cultures, between men and women"*⁶¹

Gender is above all a social ordering principle, which varies from culture to culture. It orders sexuality and the erotic interchange, human reproduction, social division of work and any other social relationship between persons and groups.⁶²

Though, the concept⁶³ of gender in the indigenous movement happens to appear – as it certainly is- a western concept and term, where relationships between men and woman are seen from a different side, or from outside the cultural reality. Furthermore, “*until right now, many people still do not understand about gender: as it would specially be about woman; and others within communities say they don't know, they don't understand*”⁶⁴. And it is that “*man and woman, from the indigenous thinking, have a vision of complementarity, which does not reflect who is more or who is less.*”⁶⁵ Though, while “*one is more in connection with institutions, NGOs and these talk about gender, then one starts to understand equity, equality, the opportunity to be able to participate in all senses, both men, women, children, old people...; how we set the same conditions to be able to work, participate, in the same manner.*”⁶⁶

From this it can be inferred that “*both have to be respected, the vision of gender as well as of complementarity, since as we know every culture is subject to changes, thus the ways of thinking*

and acting will little by little change, and these relationships between man and woman will also change. It is not a question of making impositions, but rather that culture itself start finding the need for changes. This situation is already being perceived in the real life, women who do not agree with the way of living in the community, although hard for them at the beginning have slowly started to assume other roles, breaking with gender stereotypes created by and in society. This process will cause that women and men with own conscience will assume equality of relationships and roles within a diverse society.”⁶⁷

As it has been proposed on other occasions ⁶⁸, the option would be in this case to analyze the gender relationships in the Indigenous Peoples from an internal reflection process, born from the very communities and that, in the process of rethinking and recreating culture, they restate from their own cosmovision and in relation to the national and international society, the own and not own elements that would enhance a greater gender equity to the hearth of the communities.

3.2. Determining elements: Relevant factors in the building of gender relationships of Indigenous Peoples

Gender relationships are interpersonal relationships, subject to strong norms and pressures, specific in each culture, that at the same time are formed and lived in different ways by men and women through communicative actions. In this interaction and cultural recreation, each social relationship includes the probability that one of the players submit to the other. The specifically social and cultural mechanisms that lead to the subordination of woman have not yet been empirically investigated enough in the past⁶⁹. This holds true especially when we talk about indigenous societies.

Following are mentioned some of these factors that throughout history have been determining to the breaking of the Duality concept.

3.2.1. On the supposed European “Conquest” and other “intervention threats”

“First were the Spaniards...”⁷⁰. If there is something on what indigenous women couldn’t agree more is that “the invasion or colonization brought with many very serious, very strong consequences”⁷¹, were it with Spanish, English... accent. Now then, discrepancies arise when it comes to analyze the degree of incidence this factor had in the building of gender relationships, causing a division of opinions between those who hold this as an almost exclusive factor and those who question the exclusivity of it, opting for a division of factors.

In this sense, the first voices indicate that in some places codices are still to be found wherein woman is referred to as “governing, chief of some group of people.”⁷² Although *“this was lost when the supposed conquerors arrived due to their point of view of the world, (...) they were who brought all these evils to our countries and it happened as always does: we are human and for men it was easier to say, well, yes, it must be so, let her serve me, let her stay in...”⁷³*. From then on, reference to women in old documents touches on her demands for justice.

In fact, colonization entailed a *“very special abuse reserved to women”⁷⁴*, with the use of her body as trophy. An example is the story of Malinche: *“ it was in the year 1519 and the young woman was fifteen when she gas given as a slave to Cortés, Spanish conqueror of the old Mexico (...) she became the object of reward in a horrible war. She was passed from man to man, forced to have relationships with Cortés, then with one of his lieutenants, and finally with the son of the conqueror, Martín Cortés whose exaggerated sexual appetite has been well documented in the chronicles. That officers passed Indian women to one another was a common practice in those times.”⁷⁵*

Although always under these terms, the effects of the invasion went beyond the assignation of “chauvinist” roles and the subordination to which woman was subjected to end up in a state of psychosis and self-destruction of the community: “with the arrival of Spaniards and the introduction of new values, the very community entered in a state of psychosis, since an element unknown to them was introduced. Not only the custom to subject women arrived (...), but many other customs, a whole structure that came to be inserted there. Then the community had to defend itself, sometimes confronting directly with weapons, but which were not enough, then they had to conform to it. It comes a state of psychosis that had a bearing on the self-destruction of the very community. Of course, it felt on those physically weaker, who at that time were women and children.”⁷⁶

For the second voices,” the question is, hadn’t they come, how would we be?”⁷⁷ They lay on it “the great mystery, because it is easier to blame someone: (...) it is easier, as somehow Spaniards did wrong three times over, because then, indigenous people have more where to justify their actions, their actions of internal injustices in the Indigenous Peoples to women in this case, or among them, among the peoples. (...) The truth is something very deep, are many the factors, many elements that have to be unraveled, disintegrated and integrated in order to be able to understand them.”⁷⁸

The interest is focused, then, on knowing exactly how the situation was “before that, because if one reads history in the Bible, which is the oldest book I’ve known, there, one can see the history of other cultures where that dynamic already existed, that type of unequal relation: (...) it is a shame that there isn’t much left about us from that time, where this history is presented exactly the way you can read it about the Hebrews, the Jewish, that there isn’t something like this about the Mijes, the Nawas, although there is too, but we don’t know exactly as from when it is (...) Anyhow, not everything is rose-colored in the indigenous world, neither is everything thorns or swords.”⁷⁹

“... until the supposed independence came.”⁸⁰ And in some case, as in the case of Mexico, after that came “the threat from the United States, the threats of intervention.”⁸¹

3.2.2. On The Present Responsibility Of The State

The historic perspective is accompanied by a more actual one that holds that “ what we are worried about is the now, because, the fact that Spaniards have arrived is of no much use to us, or is of no use as history or reference: we can not continue living the old history. It is healthy to tackle the problems as from now, from right now, who are the elements or agents that are pushing us closer to self-destruction.”⁸²

When understanding that “as more conflict exists in a community, conflicts of land, political conflicts, the more is woman abused”⁸³ the error lays in that “sometimes we just limit ourselves to say the man is this, the man is this other, but the whole society, the entire indigenous peoples are objects of manipulation, all this violence against woman comes from a public policy of the State”⁸⁴ since it “doesn’t have a really favorable policy to the Indigenous Peoples”⁸⁵ up to a point that the State is seen “as it would want to support the communities, but it also destroys them, it implements policies to destroy them.”⁸⁶ To what must be added, according to this same vision, the application, on the part of “our governments, of other mentalities from outside.”⁸⁷

3.2.3. On the so called Globalization and its implications

There was a time when *“the introduction of other ways of thinking, that I wouldn’t call values”*⁸⁸ came. Among these ways is mentioned *“this system that has influenced us, the chauvinism, that has concentrated in men and that is already overwhelming women”* *“Now comes globalization, Internet, television. If used properly they turn out to be useful, but if not....”*⁸⁹

a) On the power of information

That *“information is power”*⁹⁰ or that *“whoever controls information, controls power”*,⁹¹ is no doubt about in the opinion of indigenous women, and that, as such *“gender relationships are strongly influenced by the levels of information handled by men and woman;”*⁹² an aspect this, from which often and consciously women have been separated, by action of as much internal players as external ones.

Precisely as indicated above, that *“wrong use”*⁹³ of an *“immensely huge phenomenon as it is the media – television, radio – has affected us enormously”*⁹⁴. One of the factors considered more influencing in the last times, so much, that *“before you wouldn’t see such things that you see now: how woman’s body is used in the coarsest way, how it is ridiculed. All this contributes to woman’s abuse, the discredit of woman in her integrity (...) the disintegration of family,”*⁹⁵ the creation of stereotypes.

Even communication at the most personal levels has been resented by the effect of the new habits of globalization. As some women remember *“when I was little my mother would set herself to cook and the whole family would sit around the fire and there she would share with us stories, the whole life, the dangers that could happen.... And that doesn’t exist anymore. Now we have come to globalization, we buy a stove, we got ourselves in a tiny place, where the woman would come and prepare something fast, all ready-made, children watch TV and the husband somewhere else... there is no real communication anymore.”*⁹⁶

b) On urban migration

Indigenous Peoples⁹⁷, with few exceptions, interact in different ways with the national dominant society. Presently, most rural indigenous women and men live and move in a tension field between two different forms of life and culture. On one side, the subordinated rural indigenous world, and on the other, the urban-western dominating world. The tension relationship between two forms of society with different linguistic tradition, significant theories, system of values, structures and social practices where one is subordinated to the other impregnates the dynamic of transformation processes, to which also women contribute as permanent players.

One survival strategy that numerous indigenous families adopt to face the severe socio-economic crisis is to send teenager girls to work in the city. Among the alternatives they have is domestic work, selling on the street, poorly paid services and begging. In some way, this is the response to the posture that life in the city is superior, but also to the perception that they will earn more and have a better living. So it is demonstrated by following statement:

*“This is a sad town, there is no money, it doesn’t rain much anymore, crops are not good, men go to work somewhere else where they work themselves out and come back only to die; women stay to weave palm, take care of the children and go on with the town, because here we were born and grew up. In the city you shoe, clothe and live, here you don’t”*⁹⁸

Although, like everything else, migration has its cost: *“somehow, something gets lost in this trajectory, in this change. Maybe it is there where that sort of essence, that vision is lost, because you have to adapt to another climate, and amid all that, women are also being affected”*⁹⁹ In that

sense, urban migration reinforces marginalization and subordination of the indigenous women. They pass from rural patriarchal systems, with a prevalence of a combination of protection and submission of women, to environments of greater unprotection, when going to also patriarchal cultures that rejects them because of their ethnic origin.¹⁰⁰ It is even worse when migration is to other countries.

Among the problems that indigenous women face in the city are:

Those who are integrated as domestic workers, with no serious agreements that regulate their labor relationship, with minimum wages, their lives controlled by employers, they are not integrated into family life because of their ethnic origin and are vulnerable to harassment and sexual abuse¹⁰¹.

Instead of improving their economic situation, this is worsen, increasing poverty levels in addition to another form of discrimination, as it is to get a minimum salary compared to men and non indigenous people, independently from the working area.

In the city, also expressions of racism are increased because of the physiognomy and the clothes, getting to levels where access to public places, education centers and others is denied. A clear example of this is what happened in Guatemala with *“Lic*Irma Alicia Velasquez Nimatuj, who doesn’t seem prepared to slacken in her claims to obtain justice by the legal venue. This is the case of a professional woman who denounced having been object of racism and discrimination when on June 5 of this year access to the bar” El Tarro Dorado*, located in Las Americas Ave, area thirteen was denied to her just because she was dressed in the indigenous costume from Quetzaltenango (...). When this incident took place, Velasquez Nimatuj, who was with other people, identified herself as a Mayan Indian¹⁰²

(* T.N.: Lic.: stands for “Licenciada” in Spanish, title corresponding to a degree similar to bachelor)

3.2.4. On the socialization process

Based on the characteristics and norms that determine the concept of gender mentioned before, the socialization process arises, which is different for women and men, and establishes for each gender behavior guidelines, values, rules, demands, restrictions and freedoms.

Based on the biological differences between women and men, a set of social inequalities are instituted, preventing both genders from having equal access to personal and social development opportunities, and that place women in a permanent disadvantageous social position.

The way we learn to be women or men is what is called gender socialization, which starts even as the moment of birth through family which is the first socializing agent: girls get dolls, kitchenware toys, boys get cars, guns. They, ever since they are little, have more freedom to think and act; to girls this freedom is restricted because they are considered to be “fragile” and that they must “be protected”.

Beside family, other important socialization spaces are school, groups of friends, churches, youth and community organizations, the media, art, music, etc. In this socialization process, both the formal education as well as the non-formal one play a determining role. It is as from this process that gender identities are built, the feminine identification and masculine identification, as well as the way both relates to each other.

a) Education

The way girls and boys are raised as from the moment they are born is one of the elements with more bearing on the building of gender, as much in the education received in the family realm as the education implemented at school and other “*non-formal*” channels, such as communication media. In fact, starting from the premise that “*nobody is born with knowledge*”¹⁰³, the learning process will largely depend on “*how the mother and the father act*”¹⁰⁴, as it is there where chauvinism is reflected.

To that it must be added the “*educator*” role, although not necessarily positive, of the media, because of the stereotypes created where violence persists and where “*women always end up losing*”¹⁰⁵ and that is what starts “*getting into the children’s heads*.”¹⁰⁶

As far as the education player par excellence, school, is concerned, this is perceived in part as multiplier of the patriarchal system and of the “*western values*”, in detriment to the concept of the Duality meaning regarding gender. In that sense, there exists a general perception that “*the education we receive, is no longer in the way our parents did, but other education system comes: this starts inculcating us to be machist, to be dominant, all of which has always impaired women*.”¹⁰⁷

In fact, school is to be blamed not only for the reproduction of chauvinism, but for all forms of discrimination, as expressed by following testimony: “*the words, the letters, come also with tears, because you are at school, and you are supposedly being educated. The integral objective of education is the development of persons, but when you as a girl, are found in horrible situations of discrimination from your teachers, fellow students, because of your class, gender and ethnic conditions, then everything drowns you and you wonder who you are and why you are like that. When you come back in touch with your cultural roots, with your personal being, with your family, and when you start digging up within yourself and within all that environment that surrounds you, then you start saying: this was not fair, this was not what it was, and what I thought it was*.”¹⁰⁸

b) On family structure

Our society has transformed family structures in a violent way over the last times, due to poverty, the revolutionary processes, migrations, lack of personal communication... But this change is above all structural, and not in what it refers to the authoritarian pattern of patriarchy.

In this framework the different family structures affect in a diverse way the gender identity processes of girls and boys, particularly considering the importance of the strengthening process of their personality between the ages of 0 to 5. “*it all depends on certain cultural patrons of the different Indigenous Peoples*”¹⁰⁹; and the great value that woman places on family: “*without your family fight for justice is useless*”¹¹⁰

As a general opinion the idea is shared that: “*the father and mother figures are important if we talk of complementarity (although) it is not valid to think that a woman on her own is not complete*.”¹¹¹

Large families, predominant in general among Indigenous Peoples, contribute to the building of new gender identities the roles of both, the father and the mother – being these exponents of Duality or patriarchy -; a supposed division of work, a larger generational contribution; as well as “*a family environment that makes you feel that you belong in a community, that you are inside an own social organization, yours, as family*”.¹¹² Although sometimes, it is precisely in these

families where “ *the different women in the family start to exercise power over the other children.*”¹¹³

Nuclear families, on the other hand, are a trend more and more linked to the phenomenon of urban migration. In this case, the perception is that the family bonds of the large family are lost and being family reduced to a nuclear family, the husband’s domain is imposed and the double labor burden is increased. In Guatemala for example stands out the tendency to form nuclear families in which three out of four women work double shifts. For women, to work for an income does not imply getting into the public productive area, but it is about supporting the household as a productive family unit. Women preserve the language, the costume, mentalities and life conception.¹¹⁴

Although, another structure that is booming, is with no doubt, the one where families are led by the woman – *the path of their children* -, which in some cases is presented as an element intrinsic to culture, as in the case of the Wuayuu culture, evidently matrilineal, where the cultural, educative and formative composition falls specially on the woman.

This is one of the most discussed situations: “*When it is said that women can live alone, with her child, that they do not need a man for the economic world. A woman can afford it, she can bring her child up anyway, but the father’s presence, his love and the tenderness and attention that he is able to provide him are also important issues. Both figures are extremely important; nevertheless, she can decide to live alone, with a child.*”¹¹⁵ Anyway, it is the woman as a reference which is considered more essential, as it supposes a “*community reference*”¹¹⁶: generally “*women have preserved more than men the cultural elements*”¹¹⁷, although this point of view does not convince everybody, specially men, because “*the perspective of a family gets lost*”¹¹⁸

In these cases, the weight, the responsibility and the “*burden*” carried by women are bigger, specially when they assume social liabilities within the community and out of it, sharing this liabilities with their daughters when they begin to grow up. This situation makes heavier in urban areas.

3.2.5. On the changes of attitude

Even, it is necessary to explore and identify those elements or mechanisms that could encourage the equality relationships among genders, which could promote changes of attitude. The following ones are some of them:

a) Situation of lack of equilibrium within a family

The elements that lead a person to trying to change what is established can arise from the family, the nearest focus for socialization, when that person observes the “*generic injustices*”¹¹⁹. For example, “*my fight was born from that uneasiness, from that lack of equilibrium: I did not like having to work hard meanwhile my brothers did not have to do so, having to get up at 4 in the morning meanwhile my brothers did not have to do so, and I did not like being beaten meanwhile my brothers weren’t. I thought, “Why to me?” When I was 6 or 7 years old, I discovered that was not good because it was affecting me. I began to consider it was wrong, and therefore I decided to fight for the freedom and the integrity I wanted to achieve.*”¹²⁰

b) About Fighting Processes or Problematic Situations

Fighting processes, such as revolutions or land’s defense, the aggressions suffered by the indigenous peoples or the problems that get stamped in a community or a region - epidemical illnesses, migrations, etc. - are among the main factors in the process of acknowledgment and

valuation of woman's role, specially when they involve "every one, the community, and family"¹²¹, because it is in these severe conditions that the "people meditate"¹²², and "must recognize that capacity, even though sometimes it is difficult for them to accept it."

"And the youth were who look for the alternative of a better life. So, everything was a revolutionary change in which young men and women took part. Adults had to participate in this process from the communities when their sons and daughters began to fight. In that moment they began to value themselves and to appreciate women's work in the community and in the family, because the fact that she was able to intervene to solve problems as well as men became notorious."¹²³

c) About a good education and an active listening

From the field of Human Rights, information about the possibility of "having a life with less violence, more food, more education and more things"¹²⁴ has begun to be heard. Since that moment, "people have been curious, anxious or hungry for knowing more..."¹²⁵, although this happens only with "the more active people, because in a group of one hundred people hearing, may be just ten or fifty are able to stay and compromise themselves."¹²⁶

d) About Cosmvision

"After all, why not to modify it if we are in harmony?"¹²⁷ Taking culture and vision of world as points of departure, if we have a self-critical vision about them, we can turn them both into tools for the search of harmony in terms of gender, in the frame previously defined like a Revisionist Posture. "I'll always -until death- invite Indigenous Peoples to dare to examine our culture, our traditions, our practices; I'll always invite them to open our minds, because as we talk about Duality, I believe in the energy, a superior cosmic power that is with us and can help us to examine ourselves and to complement our culture."¹²⁸

Facing future, the key question is centered in "how we'll now face this, although we have much work to internally examine, to balance, to recover, to fortify, and to integrate all of us, women and men, the indigenous people, the poor people..."¹²⁹

3.3. Roles and stereotypes of indigenous women

"Who decided that women lead a more deficient way of life meanwhile men lead a more complete one?"¹³⁰. One of the possible answers to this historical question is that "one learns to be a man or a woman in a different way, according to culture and social context."¹³¹

The truth is that we can say ¹³² that a sexual and generational division of work is extremely outstanding, with the tasks and abilities, which are considered male or female, appropriate for boys and girls, for adult men and women, for old men and women. Nevertheless, in the practice it exists a great flexibility, especially in the case of women. When men absent themselves, women assume the majority of the "male" tasks, in addition to hers.

The discussion begins when trying to define if those roles are assigned or assumed by them. For some people, "it's important to talk about functions that are assumed and not about functions that are given to woman"¹³³, because "there are things women have and men do not have, due to their nature."¹³⁴ For other people, on the other hand, that's what is called "assignation by gender: the works are divided in this way because I'm a woman."¹³⁵

Anyway, there is general assent in the fact that in this division of roles some differential characters like ethnical belonging and generation assume a special relevance - each phase of women and men's age is stressed by new corporal symbols and other ways of action, which are different in each culture.

3.3.1. On when you're still a girl

In some cultures, nowadays, *"at the moment of birth, a ceremony is celebrated with the mother and the grandmother of the female baby that has just been born - she's the one who will receive the baby."*¹³⁶ In this way, the culture gives origin to a mainly symbolical relationship among the grandmother, the mother and the new born girl." Although, as some voices recognize: *"Unfortunately I believe that a girl is considered in the family like someone who is able to help with the housekeeping. When a girl is born, everybody says: "hey, you now have someone to help you to cook, to wash the trousers," but they never say something like this: "oh, she's going to be a great professional, or may be she shall be a governor, or a leader woman." That's never said."*¹³⁷

Some women consider that *"when you're a girl you assume the function of staying beside your mother, learning everything about the housekeeping -(...) never heavy works -. But the housekeeping includes not only what is within the room, but also to know how you will support the house's sustainable economy. Meanwhile the man devotes himself to major sowing, the woman is the one who maintains her vegetable garden and provides the food. In other words, "she's learning her function."*¹³⁸

Other women consider that the mothers play an important role in the conviction that *"the first is the vocation to serving that women have since we are girls, due to nature or social mandate (...), you can not decline"*¹³⁹ *"Mothers are this way, when without realizing that, we are assigning a fix role, we are impeding many things (...) We are educating them in this way, and that's what our girls are learning."*¹⁴⁰ So, in order to *"change all this situation, it is necessary to begin at home and in the school."*¹⁴¹

On the other hand, *"the positive aspect"*¹⁴², resides in that *"when you are a girl in an indigenous community, your mother and grandmother transfer you all the beautiful things they had, (...) they give to you important elements, personal and identity references that make you feel comfortable. So, even though you were serving, you were at the same time learning from grandmothers and from your own mother."*¹⁴³ In fact, between *"ten and fifteen years old, the real formation begins, and the girls take notice about the menstruation and the boyfriends."*¹⁴⁴

Besides the *"vocation to serving"*, if there is a school, the girl goes to school and, in her spare time, she can play, although sometimes *"it's very difficult to get access to play, because you have adult's responsibilities, or because there is no money or no time for it."*¹⁴⁵

3.3.2. On when you already are a teenager

In some cultures, *"at 12 or 13, girls are allowed to take part in assemblies, without the right to vote or to make any decision"*¹⁴⁶ In other cultures, this happens since the girl is 15 years old, *"because they can go to the meeting having made her minds"*¹⁴⁷ *"Girls must also take part in wakes, funerals and those kind of ceremonies, though they are not allowed to be present when animals are killed- this is to protect the girls, because they could get impressed."*¹⁴⁸

Later on, it is frequently observed *"the configuration we know as precocious maternity - that is to say, girls generally has already had a child at 14 or 15."*¹⁴⁹ In fact, *"some time ago, parents used to say that a 15 years old girl had to be married."*¹⁵⁰ This is due to the fact that if *"you've already*

grown up, the door is then opened to get married and have children, and that's the only thing you can think of, there is no other kind of thought (...) She has already to develop her tasks in her own home, she has to find out how to bring up her children."¹⁵¹ Nowadays, though, "the economical situation has affected us and now we observe more late marriages."¹⁵² Some women chose the other chance - to study. Anyway, in adolescence like in any other age, the role women will play "depends upon each family and each familiar organization."¹⁵³

3.3.3. On when you become an adult

"Childhood and adolescence are phases in which you depend upon your parents, the community and the group you belong to. But when you're an adult, you have the power to decide: you can determine what to do, where to work, and nobody orders to you what you are going to study or where you are going to work. So, you are more free to make up your mind by yourself."¹⁵⁴ That's the hour to make decision, specially "when you realize that you have a different view about marriage and you have to think if you want to marry, or to stay single, or if you want to go on with your professional career. But the decision is yours."¹⁵⁵

In most cases, at this phase, "she has already an independent family and she has to learn to take part in the community. When her husband is not at home, she must be ready to assume tasks as the land issues and the caring of animals. She must be more independent."¹⁵⁶ That's the moment where "women works with looms and dyeing..."¹⁵⁷

"And then, the woman becomes a grandmother"¹⁵⁸, and turns into counselor "because she's the one, perhaps due to her great sensibility, who can understand most problems."¹⁵⁹ It is not in vain that the older indigenous women are the main transmitters of cultural values, practices and abilities to the younger indigenous generations.¹⁶⁰

The problem arises when you resist, "then they discuss to you and affirm that you can not do that because it is not socially well-seen."¹⁶¹ Till a few years ago, it was unthinkable for the indigenous people that an indigenous woman could assume roles paradigmatically assigned to men. Nowadays, however, this is something frequently observed.¹⁶²

Anyway, the indigenous woman has to face, all through this way, the stereotypes created upon her figure "by the same society -at less the majority part of it-, and by the communication media, that also use the parameters of what is good and wrong."¹⁶³ The media, in addition to simplistic mandates, "confuse us when having to distinguish what is good and wrong"¹⁶⁴, encouraging the defense of patriarchy.

In fact, several Indigenous Peoples share an "ideal" vision¹⁶⁵ of what is a good woman - one who would be hard-working and self-sacrificing, who never would need to rest and would have special qualities in the preparation of foods and drinks, as well as in the production of stuffs and clothes or in the caring and healing of the ill. That's to say a more sensitive human being.

That's the reason why some people consider that the discussion arises when the question "What's equality of genders?" is taken into account once more. If the answer to this question is that "to give or assign equalitarian roles to man and woman, and equality means an equalitarian participation in the decisions and in power,"¹⁶⁶ so this equality of genders¹⁶⁷ would necessarily need a cultural deep change in every field. In indigenous peoples and nationalities, the roles are assigned according to sexual differences (male and female gender). If we talk about equalitarian roles for men and women, so this conception would oppose to the roles determined by cultural patterns of each community - that is to say, that within an indigenous community or people, the roles are marked as proper to a certain gender: male or female. This situation leads us to affirm

that the discourse about equality of genders in the indigenous movement is, without any exaggeration, a true challenge.

3.4. Are there taboo issues? - Violence - Discrimination and Sexual Reproductive Health

3.4.1. Sexual and Reproductive Health

The indigenous women identify themselves with the "Mother Land" or the place at the end of life, "Misri Yapti".¹⁶⁸ Anyway, within their communities they are associated to the "*existential source of all the existing. It is notorious that feminine sexuality that is to say the way in which women perceives and lives their bodies, trends to be restricted to maternity. Then, in many cases, maternity is considered like the essential element in the conformation of the content and the identity of the woman being. Among some Indigenous Peoples, the woman who has not had child, has not reached adult age.*"¹⁶⁹

The term "sexuality" alludes to one of the main axis of the construction of gender's identities; in the case of women, sexuality is in the center of their existence and determines their main social functions as mothers commissioned to the reproduction of other human beings, as lover wives who must satisfy the erotic needs of their men. In this sense, their sexuality does not belong to women; it is focused on satisfying other human beings.¹⁷⁰

In the Nautontec society¹⁷¹, the inequality between male and female bodies is shown since the moment of pregnancy. The mothers know the sex of their baby according to the pains they suffer at the moment of childbirth, they know the exact date of the birth, the number of days, and though when the children are born they receive the same cares, once they begin to walk and talk, the situation begins to change.

The girls must keep their knowledge secret since they are very little, in their daily lives. The boys, instead of keeping it secret, must show their sexuality. Sexuality has a different value for each gender - the girls should decline that knowledge in public, while the boys should affirm it. This situation is evident also among other Indigenous Peoples: silence is related to a taboo towards sexuality in these societies. This taboo is partially induced "*by religion, that supposes that everything about sex is a sin and something dirty.*"¹⁷²

Although some voices are not convinced that the subject is a taboo theme, because "*it has always been present*"¹⁷³, still they recognize that "*it's true that this is not something very spoken of*"¹⁷⁴, because of several aspects. First of all, "*because since we are children, we are educated like a woman or a man*"¹⁷⁵. In the second place, "*because we have always accepted that certain sciences and knowledge are located in certain people who were born for that, (so) we have always followed the same pattern and we have continued talking about sex with our old women or our mothers...*"¹⁷⁶ In the third place, because "*the mechanism of the reproductive system is not the only topic they do not speak of - or, if they do, they do it in a different way. But they do talk about sexuality, about menstruation, about the grown up boys, about the moment when boys and girls are fertile, although they don't talk so openly as the peoples in the western world do.*"¹⁷⁷

During their lives, women's body and sexuality spin round what's called "*a moral of precaution*", that divides public and private sexuality. In each different phase of life, there are different sexual morals, from the prohibition of female sexual activity, in order to keep innocence and ignorance about all sexual activity, to other obstacles to this activity that appears in the adult life. Silence always represents a cultural mechanism that imposes an ethical complex based on the prohibition or the limitation of the open expressions of sexuality.¹⁷⁸

In this sense, “ *the indigenous have adopted the chauvinist manners of the Paraguayan man. In the old times, among the Nivaklé, women were the owners of all the initiative in the sexual relationships. Invested with certain aggressiveness for love, she could choose the man she preferred. Nowadays, the sense of the love relationship among white people has influenced the relationships among the indigenous peoples. It is no longer woman who takes the initiative in the sexual issues; it is man. Imitating the white patron, now he dares to urge women for love.*”¹⁷⁹

a) About the body's control

Several authors assure that the feminine body has been considered for others. They affirm that in the phases of history of women, their bodies have been useful to others. Each indigenous people's behavior, institutions and values have a meaning inside its own cultural system. Then, sometimes the theoretical ideas of feminism, by insisting on the universality of the oppression suffered by women, are perceived by some of these peoples like an external imposition, because the symbols created by each group present a different situation.

In the case of women of the Timbira Indigenous People in Brazil the relationships between men and women is raised as that of complementarity, where the reproductive functions make women are perceived as an inexhaustible and unique source to create the new.¹⁸⁰ The same study reveals that the body is the property the woman has as only proprietorship and its value is guaranteed as long as she does not give without receiving.

b) On biologic and social reproduction

Biological reproduction function is believed to be exclusive of women, and therefore, social reproduction function is also assigned to women, and consequently its importance concerning human development has been devaluated.¹⁸¹

As long as women body and sexuality are accepted because they have procreation as the only purpose, that is to say, sexuality is only positive as long as it allows maternity, as it is the reason of their existence, and it belongs to women nature, a huge contradiction is being presented in terms of knowledge and usage of contraceptives practices, access to education, and market of labor.¹⁸² It is an important element taking into account that one of the main problems in Latin America, one of the biggest in Central America, is the adolescent pregnancy. “*How can I do so as not to affect my body and not to affect a life that can be starting*”¹⁸³ is the big question that is being increased when the subject of abortion is mentioned, being this aspect one that is still under discussion, even when up to a certain point it is recognized as one which can have its “*conditionings and aggravating*”¹⁸⁴.

c) On Sexual and Reproductive Health

With only mentioning these words they provoke a division among opinions, especially when they are related to those of family schedule, from those who make these words of their own, considering them as a right, related to a conception of the world from a specific viewpoint, to those who qualify them “*as any other invention coming from the western countries.*”¹⁸⁵

On the one hand the subject of the reproductive health is being qualified as “*fundamental*”¹⁸⁶, and the lack of information as “*error*”¹⁸⁷ due to the consequences, extending its repercussion to the whole community. It is also affirmed that “*in many cases it is not because of cultural rule that there are big families, or women become mothers at an early age, but because of lack of information.*”¹⁸⁸

On the other hand it is considered as *“any other invention coming from the western countries (...) with another name and another vision (...) in order to break the patterns of Indigenous people.”*¹⁸⁹ The main arguments are the followings: First, that *“we indigenous people have always been very numerous”*¹⁹⁰, what *“let us survive, because it worked as a guarantee of permanency, for every generation, (...) why cannot we go on surviving like that?”*¹⁹¹; second, *“we have always had access to that: among our people there exists the knowledge that we can leave you without having more sons if you want to, there also exists the knowledge of having a son or a daughter if you want”*¹⁹²; third, *“if we have remained more than five hundred years it is because this process of reproductive health schedule has been very efficient .”*¹⁹³

Although, without any doubt, one of the greatest reason for this repel is being found in the remembrance of those programs of compulsory family schedule, which, from the state, were fundamentally dedicated to indigenous women. In this direction, in Peru, for instance, Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres (Broad Women Movement) denounced that there officially exists thirty cases of dead women, because of massive compulsory sterilization, that was begun by the government of Mr. Fujimori, apart from 243 victims: *“some of them were sterilized by means of deceit, some others were practically kidnapped, they were locked up in posts or in health centers, or they were surprised by “permissions” coming from their husbands. Thus were the resources and chicanery to which medical staff and staff of health appealed so as to fulfill the program of “Voluntary Surgical Contraception” which was dictated by the ex president Fujimori and executed by his ministers of Health on duty and regional authorities.”*¹⁹⁴

One of these victims was Hilaria Huamán, who, in 1998, at the age of 41, was pregnant of the one which would be her last son: *“I was going there so as to be controlled and one day they told me with deceits that cleanliness would be performed to me and on the contrary, tube sterilization was performed to me and to make matters worse they left some medical gauze in the uterus”, she said. So, she continued, I was told that I would never be able to have children. I claimed to them, and they insulted me, and they asked me why I wanted to have more children if I already had several. They sent me home, despite the fact that I lived two hours away. The son I had, was the first one and the only one that I had with my second husband, she said sobbingly. From that unfortunate day on, Hilaria never recovered herself. Nowadays she goes on having pains and aches and she is weak as thousands of women who suffer at the moment from consequences of that infamous practice.”*¹⁹⁵

Whichever position would be to adopt, the consensus space between both gives importance o two powers-rights and a framework: the powers-rights towards information and the decision, closely related to the word option, and the background of the conception of the world from the indigenous viewpoint.

d) On the strategies of work

We start from a point in which we can say yes, *“yes to the fact that we can talk about sexuality in the indigenous communities in terms of adapting that word, sexuality, to a word belonging to the languages of the indigenous communities. So, it is possible for you to talk about that without feeling that people feel any offence and without feeling that you are invading privacy”*¹⁹⁶ And it is because, under certain visions, *“The risk is that, in the same way that it is seen by the West, when you start talking about sexuality it happens to be something related to something physic, and you stop being a person: The risk is to let that vision be imposed.”*¹⁹⁷

Likewise, it is being considered as a premise that *“Reproductive health programs must be born from the people inner visions, from the access to the natural medicine.”*¹⁹⁸ And it belongs to the fact that *“women have the rights to all this, that the two options must be given to you, the right of*

being said that these are the methods taken for the occidental culture as they may be called, but these are the methods that our people also offer, our old men. It implies a process of integration of women, old women, midwives, and the main people in the community of men... ”¹⁹⁹

Sexual and reproductive education is therefore fundamental, mainly applied in three environments of socialization: In the family, at school, and in the community.

In the first one, accepting that it is *“better to educate your own sons concerning this subject, rather than let other people do that with a negative connotation”* ²⁰⁰, it is also affirmed that *“confidence channels must be strengthened so as to talk more about sexuality among the indigenous families.”*²⁰¹

In the second one, also the school must be involved in a process in which teachers, both men and women, could solve any doubt about *“ How to explain to a little girl those processes that are coming without making her feel bad, and without making her feel affected.”*²⁰²

In the third one, inside the community, the question starts from *“How can we talk about that which has been denied, has been forbidden, which has been dirty and awful and turn everything around so as to let it be seen as a common thing, as something that is clean, as something that the Supreme Being has permitted, whoever he happens to be, according to the different perceptions that we have about God.”* ²⁰³

In this case, the first thing we should do is to *“to assure protection”*²⁰⁴. In order to do that, we must initially start from *“negotiations with the authorities in order to be allowed to talk about the subject, and with women themselves because they must attend and dedicate time enough to this kind of subject.”*²⁰⁵

Being conscious that *“we can not directly talk about what we want, in fact to defend specific rights of women”*²⁰⁶, the option is *“to make them see how women health is affected, and consequently, their relation with their men, and families in general; to talk about advantages and disadvantages of being well-informed, of having so many frequent sons, almost every nine months, about numerous families.”*²⁰⁷

Without forgetting that a great amount of time is required *“to stop with the silence”*²⁰⁸ and also a vision of a whole in which references to culture and men involvement are perceived as necessary.

3.4.2 Violence and Discrimination

Violence towards women is a phenomenon that starts from the history of depriving to which indigenous people were submitted along the processes of colonization and National States Conformation, and by this means people had their rights seized.

Up to such a point that for some of the indigenous women *“we did not have that problem before they came in ... before they destroyed our organizations.”*²⁰⁹ *“It is as if it were progressive, each time occidental culture comes in, society becomes more violent.”*²¹⁰ It is, in other words, the result of the patriarchy, *“it is a structure that pollutes everything, in such a way that it seems natural for us.”*²¹¹

On the other hand, discrimination by gender among the families, in rural communities and in everyday life leads indigenous women to be exposed to abuse and overburdened by work and responsibilities. Therefore to be more excluded because of the violation of their fundamental human rights.

It is at least a preoccupying situation: in some communities fathers, and husbands have the natural right to shout, insult, and hit women if they have done something bad, or if men are angry or drunk. Women live together with the one that stole them, they are exposed to prostitution, there exists the practice of buying and selling women with marital purposes, violation many times ends in matrimony. Women are victims of violation because of political reasons or during warlike conflicts.²¹²

Sexual violations with political character have caused thousands of undesired sons to be born, as well as serious affectations in the way indigenous women live their sexuality. Many of those violated women have been repelled by their husbands and their communities; they are obliged by the indigenous organizations to which they belong to keep their violations in silence, in order to prevent movement leaders (men) from feeling shame, or these women can not have pleasant sexual intercourse because they associate the sexual intercourse with the violence they suffered from.²¹³

Those research work that were made about condition and situation of women have showed that these women also face other inequalities such as the one of race, ethnic, social class, level of education, access to services, access to production means, etc. Furthermore, it has thoroughly been demonstrate that women discrimination constitutes an obstacle for the development.

Although institutionalized racism is one of the sharpest way to express violence against indigenous women, like “*political violence*”, the problem of the violence inside families has not been less important. In this sense, for some authors²¹⁴, the absence of mentioning violence against women at home, does not mean that it is not practiced, but, either the subject was not undertaken, or women are still not organized enough and they do not dare to talk about the subject.

The same voices that say that they did not have that problem, say “*we lived under a system that ruled us and violence inside families did not exist, because, for instance, among our people, when you got married, the same way that nowadays a notary does, the community was the notary, it was your family. And what happens? Once you are in, you stop being a member of your family, (women I mean), and you start being part of your husband’s family, they are the ones that are responsible. If your husband happens to attack you, your husband’s family has all the rights to become involved in the problem and to tell him to stop doing it, because since it is their responsibility, as they accepted it, it is because of shame that they will never want a nephew or a cousin to be hitting his wife. Once she gets married, the bride’s parents tell them that she is their daughter, she was educated in a way, and husband’s family becomes responsible of every single thing that could happen to her.*”²¹⁵ They are, what in other indigenous cultures has been represented by the figure of godfathers, “*as mediators of family quarrels*”²¹⁶, although at present they are not as respected as they had been before.

At an institutional level,²¹⁷ it is affirmed that a subject that was well treated is violence inside families and we can see that women of the communities are already starting a reaction, they already know that they must not tolerate violence from their husbands, because they are human beings and they have feelings.

In any case, in general terms, it can be said: “*in the past, family violence was considered as a private affair, at present, it belongs to public sector*”²¹⁸; “*violence towards women is firstly practiced by their parents, and then by their husbands.*”²¹⁹, and it is “*economic dependence of women with respect to men what does not let many women take the first step*”²²⁰. And “*poverty is the worst way of violence*”²²¹; there are also people who affirm that there exists ‘*violence*

*multiplication*²²², “reproducing the habits generation after generation”²²³, and there exists people who think that “the fact that a father can be a hitter does not mean that his son could be so”²²⁴ since “if I do not like being hit, how could I do so to my kids”²²⁵; what equally affects, considerably, children’s rights.”

a) On strategies

“In 1992, being frustrated because of the incapacity of our community service to imagine preventive strategies...I interviewed people who were victims of violence inside families. I asked them what they thought about the fact that community could do something to help to stop the violence.... As a result, there was an integral diary and a prevention plan. They proposed an initiative net which affects several services sectors in the community, being coordinated and linked to treat, educate, and administrate justice and to instigate social changes. There is a greater vision, it is a systemic one, and it has major structural changes... Now, the task is to face those powers that keep silent all women who participate in our organizations because of their experiences... We need to learn how to re-build the experience in the legitimate and professional organization in which the place has been transformed to do the major part of the movement work We need their visions to work, not only to assist affected people, but also to stop the war”²²⁶

IV. CASE STUDY

Testimony²²⁷ in the frame of the Wayuu Culture, Venezuela

There is no particular ceremony, a particular celebration at the moment of birth, but there exists during the formation. We say that Wayuu women have three important stages in their lives.

The first stage, that involves childhood, lasts up to the moment of puberty. In that process indigenous girls, who occupy the most important place in their families, go through a period of formation combined between the school and cultural values that mothers, indigenous women, transmit to them.

Once puberty stage is reached, when first menstruation comes, we make a ceremony that we call *Wayuu confinement*, which for the occidental people is called *blanqueo*: She is locked up according to the numbers of days her family stipulates, even her grandmothers. She can be that way three days, a week, a fortnight, a month, and even up to three months; she has her hair cut; she is submitted to a very strict diet in which she eats balanced food; she is given medicinal herbs.... It is what occidental people call *a must to society*. The indigenous girl goes through a process of formation, not only a cultural one (in relation to common activities that can be performed by an indigenous woman, such as knitting, handmade creations), but also a spiritual preparation one, because Wayuu women are the fundamental stone of our society, and as we are a decentralized culture, with no visible leader, in this case, indigenous women assume those roles.

From this stage on, from the moment she receives her puberty, to the moment before getting married, she is well prepared to assume the leadership within the community; it can oscillate from the age of 13, 21, 22, to 23. Everything depends on how that indigenous woman life develops. So, we already have opportunities, women start being involved in families affairs, which generally exist among indigenous people, as confrontations between families, etc. Women start having a role in this kind of problems.

Any man who wants a Wayuu woman must pay what we call a dowry, and as regards as occidental people it means women are sold: the family of the young Wayuu girl establishes an amount that is stipulated to let the man live with her, cohabit. It symbolically represents the

matrimony, a bonus for my process of formation. It constitutes a requisite that gives woman's family certain guarantee. Therefore, each time a man marries a woman, or any woman, he has to do that equally, according to what the woman's family establishes.

Another guarantee mechanism in which family is involved is in the case of violence inside families, what nowadays becomes frequent because of those bad habits that we had acquired from occidental culture, as alcoholism, or drug abuse. When that man, who is my husband, comes home, and hits me, my family has all the rights to ask him for compensation because of the damage that he caused to me. It can be both a material reparation, or a moral reparation, although generally a price can never be set; Otherwise, women have the right to make a decision whether they want to go on living together with that man, or not.

It is necessary to remember that within the Wayuu culture, polygamy is permitted, Wayuu men can have as many women as their economic capacity let them: In a way it makes our society be so decentralized. That is why we do not have either control, or an immediate authority, although we do have our Old Men's Council. Despite the fact that we have been losing them, what we have is Old Women's Council instead. Furthermore, it constitutes a guarantee as our people have survived for so many years.

Right now there are many doubts, because many women ask me how a Wayuu wife lives, since when I told them my experience they were alarmed: my grandfather had 14 wives and had 62 children. 8 of the 14 wives were sisters. Therefore many women ask me how a wife can live under the same roof where there lives another wife of the same man, who happens to be your husband: Within Wayuu culture, there was not the prototype of the jealous wife, on the other hand, both, through the process of transculturalization and the mixture of cultures we suffered from, we have assumed those roles. What did our grandmas tell us? You are the mothers, you are the procreators, you are the teachers, the ones that transmit our culture, and the ones who have to watch over the way your sons go through. With all of this, plus the fact of going out to work, they had no time enough to be pendent of whether their husbands could look at any other woman, or not. They also told us: in order to make those men feel good, you have to let them go to be pleased by other women, while you assume your wife role. What is difficult is to do this nowadays.

And it is from the moment she gets married, when she submits herself to another preparation process similar to the one she went through at puberty that she prepares herself to maternity. So she already starts a formation process of inculcating all of these principles, which she had gone through: she dedicates herself to shepherding, even to sow, or to those fundamental labors a woman has at home. And it also occurs, because of this fact that we do not need a man aside to support our children, that many of our women had left their labors at home so as to look for work sources in order to let their kids subsist.

When advanced in years, once they are 30 or 40 Wayuu women start having grandsons, their family. They become immediate advisers in the family, as for the solution of problems, or solution of conflicts. Within the Wayuu culture, decisions concerning inner conflicts in the family are not made without the determination of women, and even more, they are the speakers of them. Even, during wartime, women were the ones who determined when and how weapons were to be used, since women tend to be more stable because of their process of spiritual formation. Up to the moment they die, they become the advisers, because they are old women, wise people, the ones that had lived, the ones that transmitted culture, even to their grandsons culture is transmitted by them.

More or less, that are the Wayuu women stages in life, since they are born to when they die. Doubtlessly these stages awaken the biggest controversies for the occidental people, or they even arouse interest from other indigenous cultures. The main focus of conflict among the different visions is being centered on whether situations like these, necessarily imply to appeal to the universal rights speech, and consequently set the limits, or to make a linking between your own culture and women rights instead.

V. HOT ISSUES: ON THE THREE IDENTITIES

“We, many of the indigenous women who have learnt to recognize ourselves as sharing an identity, and therefore have assumed a position with respect to ethnic, gender and culture, have been branded as anti-feminists, retrogrades, as if we had no women consciousness, and recently, after Beijing 95, we were accused of not contributing with the movement that fights for women advance, because during the recovery of people, as we indigenous people do, specific women recovery was hidden or lost. It does not matter what they told us, it does not matter how we were verbally attacked; but in these days the non-indigenous sector also starts worrying since we, indigenous women are already being more sonorous with respect to specific recovery and we are being so, as women, poor people, and indigenous natives, who become the object for discrimination not only because we are women, but also because we are different. These differences were not taken into account in the recoverable platforms of women movement.”²²⁸

5.1. On building identities

Both gender and generic identity are not stable and permanent categories, but rather suffer from transformations and processes of negotiation, which are social processes of power, but also processes of interchange and cooperation.²²⁹ Men and women contribute with their actions and behaviors, to the transformation of the historically built identity gender: “Gender (...) in itself is not something that we “have” or “are”, but something that we do”²³⁰

Identity summarizes the contents of the answer to the question of who I am. Therefore, gender, in spite of being very important, is just a component of the identity. Each person’s identity is built depending on his family origin, the fact of belonging to a certain political, religious, social group, the race, and ethnic. Being black or white, being indigenous or half-bred will give, apart from certain physic characteristics, a lifestyle, a way of thinking, and of sharing relationships, in short, it will determine the way world is seen.

Identity is an attribute without which it is very difficult to build an individual subject. It is essential for the person who asks himself who he is when he refers to the identity, which has been assigned to him. The assignment of an identity implies the power to do so. All the assigned identities are built, implemented and reproduced by sources of power. All the people elaborate the experiences, we think about them, we interpret them according to the culture we are involved in, and the identity that was assigned in a synthesis of thoughts and effects which constitute our memory. Experiences that are received like that, also give the structure for new ways of thinking and affectivity. But people go through experiences, interpret them, and feel, and that is why they re-elaborate their identity with every step during lifetime. Ego is in permanent movement, in permanent confrontation between the already lived experiences, and the assigned ones, from which gender self-determination is being elaborated.

Gender identities are part of gender relationships. Both in themselves, and between them, they can be very contradictory; normative rules can be very ambiguous, and can be interpreted in very different ways, as to the situation and person.²³¹ The symbolic meanings are polyvalent, and can

also be modified during the course of the rituals. Even inside the same culture, different patterns of symbolic representation of gender can co-exist.²³²

Gender identity is being built according to rules and practices of socialization that are different for girls and boys, and to the expectations that society has about the roles and responsibilities that each gender has to carry out. In many indigenous societies, their cloths, roles and abilities, and tasks that are well defined strictly show gender difference as feminine or masculine. For many indigenous people, feminine identity is strongly related to the ground and fertility as well as to abilities and feminine considered specific aspects.²³³

Among the variables related to the subject of identity, the variable with-other-women relation reflects a sensible aspect in the processes of change that women perform, those who critically and actively assume their gender identity. Traditionally women are taught to distrust the ones of their own sex, according to the logic of re-affirmation of men superiority, who are more capable, with power and prestige. The process of revaluation of their own identity, leads women to develop identification relations, friendship and trust in other women, instead. It has nothing to do with compete to get favors from “the other one”, but to make common cause to get out of subordination relations.²³⁴

If to feminine generic identity, defined or designated, ethnic and of generation identities are added, the formula happens to be more than complicated. Fortunately, nowadays, there is more consciousness than when indigenous women are deprived of the value of their ethnic identity, “*identification grade with their own people and culture*”²³⁵ of the gender, “*perspective of themselves*”²³⁶, their constitution as social performers is being hindered when recognized by the group. Women have the right of being respected by their cultural diversity, and by their identity based on different specific identities, expressing “*we want to keep our identity and at the same time, we want to make our life condition better.*”²³⁷

5.2. On the triangle Gender, Generation, and Ethnia

“*Do not disturb in the anthill where it must not be disturbed*”²³⁸ it is the first premise to take into account when is time to produce an interrelation of the words gender, generation, and ethnic: “*The first thing is to know where I am, and how I am.*”²³⁹

In most of the cases, the generation change implies a change in the vision towards the subject of gender, provoked by the different contexts, situations, and already lived processes of formation. In other cases not. What is more, changes can be in the same generation: “*my mother suffered a lot the fact that women should be there, I mean, there was no equity, she should be at the service of her husband and of the family. Now, my mother is different...the same person behaves differently, for instance, with her daughters in law. Obviously, there must be some communities where instead of having positive changes for women lives, may be there are negative changes, because perhaps there are new problems to which they had to face, unsettled the people, as women reality.*”²⁴⁰

Together with the changes, many indigenous women face new expectations, many different ones, compared with their mothers or grandmothers’, as the necessity of a better coordination, and to do their reproductive and productive tasks in less time, to make a plan and to have a better consciousness of time, to be agile to move around, and to have better knowledge of reading and writing, etc. Women have to come to the understanding of the new expectations which appeared with the changes, and to take a position, without having, in many times, enough elements for the opinion. These changes, which are influenced by the practices, values, and the dominant

occidental culture abilities, and that are not well known by women, also make an impact in the way the indigenous women may use their past experiences.

The fact that young women of nowadays do not have time to learn cultural values and practices that belong to us is considered as a loss by old women. They stand out that they had time enough to dedicate themselves to learn feminine practices and abilities exclusively: In several cultures, rites of initiation of the young women are no longer practiced in which mothers and grandmothers were allowed to spend more time together when they did not go to school. They sadly confirm that the same knowledge is no longer transmitted to younger women.²⁴¹

For the younger women, *“together with the fact that with globalization we are more liberal and less conservative...”*²⁴², *“we make this analysis as we are facing another situation much more complex, in which we have to see what perspectives we have for the future, while they have already lived,(...) while old people do not use the words since both men and women have the same place, and it always depends on whether you live in the city or in the same indigenous community.”*²⁴³

What it remains clear is the fact that *“according to the ages, necessities are also different”*²⁴⁴, although the challenge consists in recognize that, despite the fact that necessities are different, *“at the end we will get to one which will join us.”*²⁴⁵ From this challenge success, we will have a lot to say *“necessity to share with mothers and daughters, in other places of socialization which are not the traditionally assigned such as the church or at home.”*²⁴⁶

In this binomial word gender-generation it is important *“to consider the environments in the process of formation of the same people, and what is done towards community, towards the cosmos”*²⁴⁷; and *“to take into account the other’s viewpoints, the point is to present the gender as an option, but not to impose it.”*²⁴⁸

From the other duo, the one of gender-ethnic, taking into account the possibility that there exist points in common, as, for instance, *the subject of talking about it”*²⁴⁹, the immediate reference is the *respect towards diversity*²⁵⁰, based on the dialogue and knowledge interchange. We start from the fact that *“situations between differences are very difficult, even more when a point in common is reached, but we can not get to a community and impose the concept of gender without thinking or perhaps imagining, that that community lives with it without knowing that it is gender”*²⁵¹ The first thing *“is to know their conception of the world from a specific viewpoint, lifestyle of people and not to give them a medicine for an illness which may be does not exist. And in the case of difficult situations, in terms of equity between men and women, then initiate, not with that word gender, but looking for the equilibrium where equality, justness and respect above all be reached.”*

5.3. On other ways to see Gender: Feminism

At this level, there is an enormous variety of opinions, ranging from its knowledge to the possible points where both movements are interconnected. *“The matter is that feminism has always been bad considered in the terms of those who have promoted feminism, how they have encouraged it, how the message has reach its destiny and how it was perceived. These are four important aspects of feminism that many women refuse to accept.”*

Historically, *“there has always existed an enmity between the women’s movement and the indigenous movement. We are made to hold a destructive competition among ourselves.”* In a first approach, one could see *“very difficult an agreement between these movements because*

feminism is centered around sexual discrimination and feminine themes,... but it does not consider other elements such as racial discrimination, etc."

In general terms, people ignore, in different levels, what the feminist movement implies by itself and unanimously recognize that the stereotypes created around feminism have greatly determined the perception of the movement. In this sense, it results interesting to pay attention to testimonies like the following: *"In my place, feminism is seen as if woman, because of being a woman, would want to impose herself over man; feminism is seen as an imposition. Gender, on the other hand, is considered in the aspect of how to create a family and how to establish relationships between women and men."*

The positions are contraries. On the one hand, those who see feminism *"like a radical stereotype intending to face chauvinism, which is also a radical stereotype. The balance that people look forward can not be achieved between two radical stereotypes. That's why we have lost our rights."* On the other hand, those who consider feminism like *"a new option with a perspective of a world where women could be respected. Some people say that it is an ideology; nevertheless, I believe it's a way to see life from my woman's eyes, it means to respect every woman's decision. I think feminism aims to look for respect towards women and their female being. What does this mean? It means that you fight against the system, against the current, and you'll face many obstacles and you'll be bad considered because the patriarchy will not give you the chance to be well considered. Then, being a feminist implies to create conflict." "It's not possible to change the world turning it into a better place without bothering anybody."*

The great doubt is where feminism fits in the Indigenous Peoples, especially when trying to join the three previously mentioned identities: the ethnical, the gender and the generational ones. In this sense, the answers are categorical in a first approach: *"it's impossible to conceive a feminist indigenous woman because in their culture there is nothing. I have tried to find some element making allusion to feminism in my vision of the world, but I do not find anything at all. In this way, we return to what I said a moment ago - you cannot take medicine for an illness that does not exist. If according to theory, Dualism is important within Mayan vision of the world, feminism can not exist, because theoretically there is a situation in which women and men are the same: we are at the same level or upon the same glance."* In fact, *"I have never considered feminist the indigenous women; well, they fight for the defense of women's rights,"* though some women describe in detail the situation saying that *"there are hardly some feminist women, or they do not declare themselves feminist. In fact, I believe that we are not so many: the ones who are working and deepening in women's aspects are very few."*

"The truth is that the term "feminist" does not apply in our world, it is never used. Instead of that, the male indigenous leaders are beginning to use it. It is convenient for them to use this term in order to disqualify our work, in these terms: "Oh, she's a mad feminist, she's a radical feminist. She has no importance, she has no consistence." That's what they say."

In this sense, another obstacle when talking about feminism within the frame of the Indigenous Peoples has been the inclusion in the discourse of one of the most delicate subjects: sex. *"There have been many feminist women who have encouraged a sexual identity that does not correspond to what society asks us. Then, when talking about feminism, everybody relate it with that fact. And being sex a taboo in any society - not only in the indigenous societies -, so the feminist cause gets affected by this fact."*

We could say that the dispute between both movements has its focus precisely in the interconnection between ethnical and gender's identities, with the incidence that generational

changes have over it. The indigenous women accuse, from their view, the absent of ethnical and cultural identity in the western feminist perspective.

So, it is said that *"the feminists shall also have to understand that, though there are values that are not in use, women are fighting for the practice of those values, and that is not seen. The feminist women stress the fact that you should question your culture. What we do not like is the imposition, the fact that somebody else tell you what you have to do, when you have the power to decide by yourself. I do not want her - because of being a feminist - to come and give me the tools to do it. She may help me, she may walk beside me, she may tell me that one strategy can be useful for me, but I do not want her to impose me anything. Perhaps that's what many feminist women have made: to impose."*

Sometimes, this opposition gets to such level that, within the feminist movement, there has been very strong tightness, due to the need to recognize the much oppression that women live, making them subjects of several identities.

Some other women, though, have not closed their doors to feminist movement. *"First of all, let me reach the depth of colors, the shapes and the designs. Then I shall tell you if I like it or if I prefer to get a different one."*

5.3.1. About feminism's contributions

The matter is that *"one could not decline to recognize women's fight, one could not decline to recognize women's fight in history. And perhaps, feminism has helped me to reach to that process of self-critical of my own values that may be affecting me as a woman and as a human being."* The fight for women's rights is the main contribution of feminism, recognized from the indigenous perspective.

"The important achievements obtained to benefit all the women, indigenous or not," are products of that fight. These achievements have been materialized in their incidence in public policies and in the international or national decision spaces, with their influence over the International Agreements, Human Rights and Women's Rights, over laws and health. With these achievements, *"they have opened new ways for women from their perspective, from their fight, from their experiences. But it has been good for us because we're leaving under the same system. That's why I feel that a part of this proposal may be useful and that we are able to enrich it anyway from our view, or to use some methods and conceptions in order to begin to work, and to deepen into the indigenous world."*

For those people who support this position, *"the indigenous peoples are also included in the system of patriarchy and what is happening in this system is affecting us. They have reached a conclusion: there is a moment when the existing rules decline and other habits -like the habit to hit - begin to establish. Then, the authorities are no longer so respected."* Let's remind the Revisionist Position: *"we should deeply analyze how are things in this sense in order to see what way we should follow. The Indigenous Peoples should make an analysis - it would also be a matter of resistance."*

5.3.2. On the contributions of indigenous women to feminism

The whole indigenous women's vision of what we universally know as gender is something that the feminist movement should at least know, or study. Nevertheless, if we were to underline some key aspects of the indigenous movement, we would mention the conceptions and the visions of balance, Dualism and harmony, with all their consequences, which have already been mentioned.

In this way, this is to urge to reconsider the feminist statements. This revision must include the aspects of spirituality and integrity, and the traditional wisdom, without forgetting for a single moment the richness of the world's diversity of cultures.

5.3.3. On the design of possible spaces for the encounter

"Sitting to speak and finding a meeting place where to strengthen ourselves" is presented like a challenge. In spite of the fact that feminist women have some prejudices against the indigenous women, *"they consider us inferior beings"*, having these prejudices obstructed the possibility of sitting all together and sharing coincidences, we can say that we have already walk the first steps - some meeting places begin to appear.

For example, we reckon from the revision of the powers feminism has always persecuted. It is a power of moral authority, in which the reason, the horizontal relationships, the inclusive perspective, the agreement, the unity and the resistance are prevalent matters. It takes knowledge as a ground, in opposition to all the values represented by patriarchy. So, the truth is that we could affirm that *"the same basis of indigenous power is the reflection of the powers established by feminism."* In fact, *"the same historical step that took away the collective rights is the one that took away women's right - the colonization's process."*

We should reckon from recognizing that the opposition between these two movements is partially due to the fact that *"the feminist movement has not meditated enough about the ethnical matter and the indigenous women have not meditated enough about how they are affected by patriarchy"*. We should assume that *"a common frame could be the frame of Human Rights"*, We should be aware that *"we are dealing with a very difficult matter: identity"*, in all its meanings, and that it is extremely important to *"understand the other women, and to learn that the other women have a similar or equal perception than me, and to accept that ethnical group or class are two things we must take into account, as they refer to my and their specificity, which does not impede us to find a common aim - to defend our rights"*. If we reckon from this perspective, we face the following points:

"The important thing is to be critic. Then, the decision's power of woman will begin to play a role and she will be able to say: "This is the pattern of woman that I want to achieve", no matter if it's called gender, feminism, Mayan vision of the world, etc. If I am able to take some elements from all these movements taking as a ground the respect towards myself, my culture and my traditions, my personality, my community, my people, and I know that I am not affecting anybody, then we go the right way."

ANNEX

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS: INPUTS FOR THE DECLARATION AND PLAN OF ACTION OF THE FIRST INDIGENOUS WOMEN SUMMIT

6.1. Contributions to the Declaration

The indigenous women of the Americas, gathered in the First World Indigenous Women Summit to be held in Oaxaca, Mexico, between 1st and 4th December, 2002 support the proposals made within the framework of the Present Declaration and Plan of Action.

Considering that:

1. We believe in co-existence and mutual respect among cultures, peoples, genders and generations, where dialogue, communication and interchange within the framework of a horizontal model prevail.
2. Any gender perspective should result from recognition and respect for multiculturalism and interculturalism, and thus from different views of the world and peoples' traditions.
3. Our idea of gender comprises the interrelationship among generic, ethnic and generational identities; therefore, all analyses and interpretations must start from these assumptions.
4. Indigenous women start from an integral idea of group and as such, we aim at the real exercise of concepts such as Duality, Balance and Complementarity understanding that the present situation regarding gender relationships needs to be revised and transformed.
5. We share the idea that the concept of gender refers to "the group of characteristics and social, economic, political, cultural, psychological and legal standards assigned to each gender in particular"²⁵², in a horizontal relationship and which need to be deeply transformed.
6. Gender relationships refer to interpersonal relationships, subjected to rigorous standards and strong pressure, specific to each culture that are, at the same time, composed of and lived differently by men and women by means of communicative actions. These relationships are subjected to several factors such as European colonization, the present responsibility of the state, globalization, information, the creation of stereotypes, urban migration and different socialization processes; thus, attitude changes originate within the framework of fights or problematic situations, good information and active listening and one's own view of the world.
7. There exists a sexual division of labor within Indigenous Peoples, where ethnical and generational factors should not be forgotten.
8. The ignorance about the contribution of indigenous women to the creation of life, the transmission of their culture and their contribution to change and indigenous support has been responsible for the lack of respect regarding identity and ignorance about peoples and indigenous communities' traditional cultural practices.²⁵³
9. Sexuality represents one of the main bases in the construction of gender identities, always present in indigenous peoples, though from their own view of the world and culture. Therefore, sexual and reproductive health education is vital in all spheres of socialization, though they should be adequate to our own cultures, where the power-right of information and decision prevail, closely linked to the term "option".
10. Historically, the female body has been considered a body for others; we therefore demand the right to choose and control our own bodies.
11. Taking into account that the female body and sexuality are solely destined to procreation, and therefore female sexuality is only positive as a means to maternity- the main *raison*

- d'être* and women's nature-, a great contradiction arises in terms of knowledge and use of contraception methods, access to education, and the work force.²⁵⁴
12. Since colonization times, we indigenous women have been object of systematic violence, institutionalized racism and discrimination of all sorts and in all spheres of life, thus affecting our personal development as well as that of indigenous peoples in general.
 13. We state that we should be treated with equality and our dignity be respected; we should not be discriminated on grounds of our origin, culture, skin color, religion, mother tongue, age, gender, socioeconomic status. We are entitled to possess our own culture and identity.²⁵⁵
 14. The underlying cause of discrimination and racism against Indigenous Peoples is the denial of Indigenous Peoples' right to the self-determination. This kind of racism is deeply rooted in colonial times and continues growing in our countries, in non-indigenous societies and among our people, between men and women. We indigenous women are subjected to discrimination and racism against our people.²⁵⁶
 15. Being deprived of our land and our territory means to force the great majority of Indigenous People to migrate to urban centers, thus contributing to a greater poverty and family disintegration, which affects especially women and children.²⁵⁷
 16. Gender and generic identity do not represent stable or permanent categories, but they are subjected to transformation and negotiation processes, that is to say, social processes related to power, as well as interchange and co-operation processes²⁵⁸; therefore gender identities are built according to gender-specific socialization standards and practices.
 17. The feminist movement has achieved important goals for the benefit of other women, indigenous or not, though not having reflected enough on ethical issues, human rights being the common denominator.
 18. One of the future challenges is to achieve the union of tradition and innovation, a true knowledge of women's rights, generational change, the break with preconceptions and stereotypes or a dialogue with feminist movements, among other groups.

We therefore express our will to continue working within the framework of the social, economic, political, cultural, psychological and legal fields of action, agreeing that:

6.2. Contribution to the Plan of Action

Social Field

1. Individual women and indigenous women's movements should become visible, strengthen as women, in order to work on the issue of gender with both men and women.
2. UNIFEM, PROLEAD, NGOs, States and Universities should develop women's skills, fostering educational spaces and educating on empowering.
3. Educational centers in the area of human resources should incorporate within their syllabi aspects related to the conceptualization of gender from indigenous women's perspective.
4. Indigenous women's movements should strengthen and broaden policies of alliances with all social movements, especially female movements, fostering gender solidarity.
5. All persons, legal and individual ones, should fight against all sorts of existing discrimination.
6. States should end with all sorts of violence, including sexual violence as a war weapon in armed conflicts, especially used against women and children.²⁵⁹
7. States should support international efforts aimed to punish sexual violence in armed conflicts.
8. UNIFEM, PROLEAD, Programs, Projects and NGOs should strengthen the organizational aspect, encouraging the participation of young people.

9. States should guarantee Indigenous Peoples' rights, especially women's right to a quality health care, suitable from a cultural point of view and which respects their identity and traditional medical knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and Communities.²⁶⁰
10. Women's movements- indigenous or not-, FIMI, NGOs, Universities or others should share information, methodologies, strategies and lessons learnt within the framework of work with indigenous women.
11. The media, families, institutions, educational centers, States, Ministries of Education should break taboos and negative stereotypes used related to ethnic, generic and generational identities.
12. Local, national and international entities should compile, analyze and disseminate information itemized by gender, race, and generation, in all fields.
13. States and Universities, Programs, NGOs should launch programs enabling access to formal and technical education of indigenous women.

Economic Field

1. States, Programs and Projects should favor women's access to and control of economic and financial resources, through the creation and establishment of mechanisms and spaces, aiming to achieve an economic autonomy.
2. States working with indigenous women should develop policies and programs aiming to improve economic and social conditions of those forced to migrate to urban centers.²⁶¹
3. States should guarantee indigenous women the right to own a territory and productive resources.
4. Indigenous women's productive skills should be strengthened, as well as their successful insertion in the work force by means of education and technical skills in activities, which promote gender equality and life quality.
5. NGOs, IADB should create opportunities and conditions for an access to credits destined to indigenous women.
6. Local projects and governments should open crafts markets created by indigenous women.

Political Field

1. IADB, OAS, NNUU, the international community should encourage the creation of model favoring an integral horizontal participation.
2. The access of women to decision spaces should be encouraged.
3. PROLEAD, UNIFEM, universities, educational centers, programs, projects and NGOs should encourage leadership training among indigenous women.
4. Women's movements and NGOs should take part in the creation of public policies destined to gender from indigenous women's point of view.
5. States, local, state and national Governments should formulate policies and create mechanisms for communication, granting indigenous women access to the media.

Cultural Field

1. Indigenous women should favor a generational change, where ancestral and modern knowledge combines.
2. All Indigenous Peoples and women's movements should revise cultural patterns objectively, in order to favor balanced gender relationships.
3. All indigenous women's movements, Programs, Projects, FIMI, should recover our values and traditional knowledge as the basis for building gender relationships.
4. The media should disseminate the integral role of women within the indigenous culture.
5. FIMI, UNIFEM and PROLEAD should favor intercultural dialogue spaces.

Psychological Field

1. Educational centers programs and projects should strengthen indigenous women's self-esteem.
2. Indigenous women's movements, programs, projects should strengthen individual identity, as well as the cultural identity of all peoples.
3. Educational centers, programs, projects should favor self-awareness processes to know ourselves better.
4. States and Health Programs should encourage and promote the psychological care and mental health of those women who have suffered any kind of psychological problem.

Legal Field

1. States should favor, on all national levels, the ratification and effective implementation of agreements, treaties and legal instruments signed on a national level, by means of a positive legal repercussion in each country.
2. States and all actors should encourage the creation of laws, non-discriminatory in terms of gender, social status and race.
3. States, educational centers, programs and projects should facilitate people the knowledge of existing legal instruments and raise awareness over the importance of their implementation.

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- ²⁵⁰ Jocón, Maria Estela, , indigenous woman of the Political Association of Mayan Women ,Moloj, Mayib´ Ixoquib´, Guatemala.
- ²⁵¹ Idem.
- ²⁵² Marcela Laggard, quoted in *Develando el Género, elementos conceptuales básicos para entender la equidad*. Arias Foundation for the Human Peace and Progress.
- ²⁵³ Idem.
- ²⁵⁴ Nauzonteca 1997.
- ²⁵⁵ ALAI, Declaration of the Afro Peoples on the Forum of the Americas for the Diversity and Plurality, in Plan of Action and Specific declarations, Quito, Ecuador, 13 to 16, March 2001, page. 61.
- ²⁵⁶ Ibid, Declaration of Indigenous Woman of the Americas page 102.
- ²⁵⁷ Idem.
- ²⁵⁸ Anderson 1999
- ²⁵⁹ Ibid, 104.
- ²⁶⁰ Ibid, Plan of Action, page 35
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