

Gender And Ethnic Identity In Rural Grassroots Development: An Outlook From The Huasteca Potosina, Mexico

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ABSTRACT: From the colonial to the neoliberal era, indigenous men and women have suffered from global expansionism. In Latin America, indigenous peoples and rural societies often resist, challenge, and creatively interact with the processes of globalization. In this article, I examine a grassroots movement in the Huasteca region of Mexico that engages in a gendered model of participatory development. The men and women who are members of two local grassroots organizations cooperate with state institutions and NGO facilitators to adapt to a global economy. At the same time, they challenge cultural stereotypes and gender inequality. By tracing the history of this grassroots initiative, I will explore the characteristics and outcomes of gendered community participation and poverty alleviation projects as tools for empowerment in terms of challenging cultural stereotypes and gender inequalities while diminishing aspects of economic marginalization. The process of empowerment that grassroots organizing offers to indigenous women comes to life as women talk about their struggle to fight oppression, marginalization, and submission to create new consciousness of themselves as women and as members of ethnic groups. Narratives of rural, indigenous, and *mestiza* women em-

phasize the social complexity of their realities, and highlight the fluidity and situational nature of ethnic identity as a political and strategic choice influenced by political agendas and development programs.

Introduction

Beginning in the 1980s, the globalization of national economies has had a heavy impact on the rural poor throughout Latin America. In Mexico, despite growing economic stagnation and increasing economic and social problems, external pressures of the global market have forced severe adjustments in the national economy. Beginning in the 1990s, Mexico implemented a massive program of market-oriented neoliberal economic reforms. In the countryside, this policy shift favored commercial agriculture over small-scale farming. Although rural communities have not been neglected altogether, the withdrawal of government subsidies has led to drastic changes for the *campesino* sector.¹ In 1992, a constitutional amendment ended the special status of communal land tenure (*ejido*), which further increased the pressure on poor *campesinos* (peasants) and indigenous farmers to change their production habits and explore alternatives.

Rural societies in Mexico have responded in various ways to cope with the changing circumstances in a global economy. In this article, I describe how rural indigenous Nahua men and women in Huasteca Potosina, Mexico are engaging in a heterogeneous process of globalization where they enact, modify or reject cultural and economic values of the global development encounter. I will tell the story of two grassroots organizations that work together to find local responses to changing conditions in the national and global economy. The Union of Peasant Women of Xilitla (*Unión de Mujeres Campesinas de Xilitla*) and the Agricultural Cooperative: Equality of Xilitla

(*Sociedad Agropecuaria Cooperativa: La Igualdad de Xilitla*) work from a grassroots model on complementary gender-specific projects. Nahua and rural men and women embrace a gender-sensitive model of participatory grassroots development, which allows them to define gendered expertise in resource management, production strategies (staple crops and high-value crops), marketing, and in community service and self-help projects: The women's union is entirely organized by women who attempt to improve household income and nutrition through small productive economic projects and a local town restaurant. The agricultural cooperative is organized by men, who are often the husbands of women's union members. The cooperative works on new agricultural techniques and on the marketing and sale of their coffee harvests in order to diminish economic marginalization. This gendered participation has resulted in challenges to women's marginal roles in local community affairs and their overall scant political participation, as well as to the household division of labor.

It is without a doubt that gender is intrinsically linked to other layers of power and identity, such as race, class, and ethnic identity (Cornwall 1998). Building on the recent proposition by feminist participatory researchers to be more inclusive in terms of gender, I hold that development projects and development discourse should be problematized in terms of gender and ethnic identity especially in regions with high numbers of marginalized indigenous and rural populations such as Mexico and the rest of Latin America. The social complexity of the realities of the men and women engaged in the grassroots movement described in this article shows that it is insufficient to only acknowledge differences in terms of social class and gender. While most cooperative members stake a claim to an indigenous identity as part of their grassroots participation and ethnic revitalization, the population is both indigenous and *mestizoized*.² Interviews and testimonials demonstrate that there is significant fluidity in people's self-identification. In

this grassroots initiative, people's identities are constructed on a continuum between *mestizo* (mixed cultural heritage) and indigenous, embodying both contradiction and complementarity. This case-study shows that ethnic identity issues are central in the development encounter along with gender.

The Setting

The Huasteca region of Mexico stretches from the Eastern Sierra Madre to the northern Gulf Coast and between the Panúco river in the north and the Cazonces river in the south. It comprises a wide geographical area that crosses borders of three states: Hidalgo, Veracruz, and San Luis Potosi. It is customary to speak of three Huasteca regions: the Huasteca Hidalguense, Veracruzana, and Potosina. The site of this study, the *municipio* (municipality) of Xilitla, is one of the southernmost *municipios* located at the edge of the Sierra Madre mountains in the Huasteca Potosina. Differences in altitude throughout the area, ranging from about 1,778 ft. to 3,779 ft. above sea level, give rise to variations in ecological zones, agricultural activities, and subsistence practices, including coffee cultivation, fruit trees, and timber. Mountainous terrains and steep hills characterize the topographic distribution of Xilitla. Rainfall is abundant from May to October but remains frequent throughout the year, supporting the rich subtropical vegetation. Xilitla is a large *municipio*, which includes the municipal town (Xilitla) and at least 23 rural communities in the surrounding mountains, which have a majority indigenous population (approximately 60%).³ The total population of the *municipio* in 1995 was 46,757 inhabitants, as estimated by national census data (INEGI 1995).

To my knowledge, there are three main patterns of land tenure in this part of the Huasteca region: Private property (large land-holdings and private small holdings of 1 to 5 hect-

ares (*minifundios*), communal land tenure through *ejidos*,⁴ and in some cases indigenous agrarian communities based on historical claims dating back to pre-Columbian times. *Minifundios* are common in the rural communities and *ejidos* of Xilitla.⁵ The main agricultural economic activity in the *municipio* of Xilitla is coffee cultivation.⁶ Since its introduction in the region in the late 19th century, coffee has become the main cash crop for both capitalist agriculturalists from Xilitla and for campesinos from rural villages. In the rural communities, which are typically located in higher elevations of the municipality, cultivation is carried out on non-irrigated, sloped fields. Campesino households also cultivate other crops within mixed gardens, such as sugar cane, citrus, corn, beans, and squash. These crops are primarily grown for subsistence and petty-trade in local markets.⁷ The high elevation and cool climates of many rural communities limit subsistence cultivation to one corn harvest per year. At these altitudes, the quality of the coffee harvest is also constantly in danger of winter frost.⁸ The rural communities of Xilitla are composed of predominantly agricultural households⁹ engaged in a mixture of subsistence farming and small-scale commercial agriculture. With only a limited hybrid agricultural production base and a minute amount of agricultural surplus for sale, rural households use other economic strategies in order to complement agriculture with income-generating occupations. These remunerative activities include sharecropping, trading vegetables and fruits in local markets, breadmaking, storekeeping, tailoring, and local transportation between communities and the municipal town. Landless rural men and women work as sharecroppers on the fields of other villagers or big landowners; or periodically migrate to urban centers. The wealthier people of rural communities are generally not full-time cultivators, but primarily engage in nonagricultural occupations, such as trading, storekeeping, and local transportation. Townspeople engage in various economic activities and although some big landowners could be labeled

capitalist-agriculturalists, coffee production is rarely their only source of income. Townspeople and big landowners also own local businesses to ensure a steady flow of income throughout the year and prepare for the possibility of bad harvests.

The economic marginalization of Xilitla's rural population is high. In 1995, national census data (INEGI 1995) showed that 92% of the inhabitants of Xilitla made less than 50 Mexican pesos per day (roughly \$5 USD), 75% use firewood for cooking and heating, 83% do not have drainage or toilets. The majority of Xilitla's rural communities are classified as extremely marginalized (27 of 190 localities) or highly marginalized (102 of 190).

Cultural marginalization and ethnic discrimination are not part of official census data; therefore, exact figures cannot be supplied. Nonetheless, it is clear that indigenous men and women of Xilitla share the fate of other native peoples who suffered from 500 years of cultural oppression and exploitation since the violent Spanish conquest and subsequent period of colonization marked by a massive campaign of slavery and forced evangelization in the Huasteca region.¹⁰

In the last century, institutionalized assimilatory politics have contributed to the cultural marginalization and homogenization of indigenous peoples in Mexico. Specifically in the Huasteca region, the indigenous communities lost the institutional recognition of Indian governments after the 1910 Revolution with the eradication of the Indian Republic (*Republica de Indios*).¹¹ Indigenous language use in public schools was prohibited and punished until recently, and indigenous traditional clothing was banned in the 1960s. Since Mexico's declaration to be a multiethnic nation-state in 1992, the National Indigenous Institute (*Instituto Nacional Indigenista* or INI) and other national institutions now attempt to "recover" or save (*rescatar*) and promote selected aspects of indigenous culture with programs for indigenous dance festivals, folk culture, handicrafts, and traditional medicine. Contrary to this seem-

ingly benevolent effort of a top-down model of cultural recovery, bilingual schoolteachers in Xilitla's rural communities continue to promote Spanish as the primary language.¹² and the long history of oppression and marginalization is imprinted deeply into the people's collective memory and remains part of their local realities today.

Methodology

This paper is the result of multiple field research periods in the Huasteca region carried out from 1997 through 2000. In this article, I reflect on the insights I have gained from a process of participation, ethnographic research, and the collection of testimonials in the *municipio* of Xilitla. I used a combination of traditional methods in cultural anthropology, such as participant observation and interviewing, together with the collection of oral histories, life histories, and testimonials (Tiedje 1998; Tiedje n.d.). I chose the latter three qualitative research methods in order to include the voices of different actors involved in this grassroots movement. I primarily conducted semi-structured or unstructured, and individual or group interviews. In response to the feminist critique of science and the dismissal of scientific ethnography, which tended to present "a culture" from the point of view of a (usually male) omniscient observer, I perceive the need to stress the "I" of the research subjects by allowing them to speak for themselves and include their voices, multiple voices, as well as my voice and our conversations in the final product, the text. Hence, the use of testimonials and citations of verbatim quotes in the ethnographic section of this article is an attempt to diminish my ethnographic authority and find ways to transform the objects of my research into subjects (Wolf 1992: 52). In her ethnography of sorcery in the French countryside, Favret-Saada (1977) introduces the notion of "speaking subjects" (*sujets parlants*),

which I find particularly useful to represent the dialogic moments of field research and have the people speak for themselves. While I believe that the collection of testimonials with grassroots members in the women's organization was most suited for my research on the voices and local perspectives on gender and ethnic identity in participatory development, oral histories and life histories were also necessary to collect complementary information on gender relations and the history of the grassroots movement.

Oral histories were conducted with outside observers who are not members of the cooperative, such as the priest and catechists who assisted and observed the beginnings of the grassroots movement in the 1970s, as well as development facilitators, such as members of a Mexican NGO that has worked in the area since the 1990s. Oral histories were necessary to compare chronological data and get an outside perspective, and to assist in identifying key informants and leaders in the men's cooperative and women's organization. I also found it necessary to conduct life histories to understand the gender relations and the situation of cultural and economic marginalization before the women's involvement in the cooperatives. The data collected through life histories were used to contrast earlier experiences of triple oppression with the women's testimonials as members of an organization. The women's individual life histories provide insight into the traditional gender system before grassroots participation as well as the different life stages of rural and Nahua women. Life histories were conducted with six older women, aged fifty to sixty, who are not involved in the grassroots movement, as well as with twelve female grassroots members between thirty-five and sixty years old. Life histories were recorded depending on how comfortable the women were in the presence of a dictaphone.

Based on the information provided through oral histories and life histories, I conducted recorded testimonials with

twelve women who at the time of my research in 1998 were participants in the women's organization. In addition, I conducted group interviews with organized women in six rural communities on their participation in the grassroots movement. As Lynn Stephen proposed (1994, 1997), life histories or testimonials are better suited to reveal the complex interactions between personal identity constructions and structural conditions. The collection of testimonials allowed me to assess concrete meanings of gender and ethnic relations, which are presented here as experiences or voices of the women rather than only relying on interpretations of abstract processes or categories.

The People: Ethnic Identity and Mestizaje

In Xilitla, the social and ethnic make-up of the population is diverse. The research population demonstrates much fluidity in people's self-identification. I have worked with both *mestizoized* and indigenous populations for this study. In this article, the notions of indigenous, *campesino*, and *mestizo* are not fixed categories but stand for relational identity constructions as they bear heteroglossic possibilities depending on particular contexts (see Beaucage 1994).

Although originally conceived of as a category to describe ethnic mixing or people of mixed race by Mexico's nation-builders who, following José Vasconcelos defined the *mestizo* as the cosmic race, the term *mestizaje* is deployed in various ways in the *municipio* of Xilitla (see Favre 1996). Townspeople generally identify as *mestizos* based on their mixed indigenous and European background. Among the rural population, people who call themselves *mestizos*¹³ usually identify with more urban values and do not speak an indigenous language. Yet the concept of *mestizaje* remains plural in the rural communities because the processes of *mestizoization* lead people to

adopt more than one possible set of values. In the development encounter, some cooperative members are manipulating ethnic identity or *mestizaje*, constructing their identities on a continuum between *mestizo*, ethnic Nahua, and indigenous.

The primary processes of *mestizoization* or ladinoization¹⁴ of indigenous language speakers in Xilitla's rural communities are induced by schooling and migratory work. Schooling probably remains the most important factor of modification in cultural values among Mexico's rural population as it affects all children aged three to fourteen. Despite the existence of bilingual schools in the *municipio* of Xilitla, many parents criticize the disrespectful conduct of some school teachers who do not acknowledge certain codes of conduct in the rural communities and exercise a culturally different influence on the young children.¹⁵ Many parents also show concern that their children begin to reject Nahuatl when starting elementary school and claiming that they are unable to speak it. This tendency leads to a generational gap and creates a steady decline in Nahuatl speakers. Another factor leading to *mestizoization* is the pursuit of migratory work in the United States or in Mexican urban areas such as Mexico City, Monterrey, and San Luis Potosí. After returning to their homes, many young men and women dress differently, change their hairstyles, and import new material goods such as TVs.

The term *indígena* (indigenous) poses a more problematic stance in the people's self-identification as it resonates the term *indio* (Indian), which stands as an insult for the rural population to describe them as dirty, backward, or lazy. It is more common that people in Xilitla identify with their ethnic heritage and language as Nahua or Teenek, defining themselves by their cultural background and community of origin while implicitly or explicitly distinguishing themselves from other cultures. Nahuatl speakers identify as Nahuas whereas Teenek speakers identify as Teenek or Huastecos¹⁶ (Tiedje 1998). According to the national census (INEGI 1995), less than half the

population in the *municipio* of Xilitla speak an indigenous language in addition to Spanish. The main indigenous language spoken in this *municipio* is Nahuatl (see footnote 3). Only in one *ejido* of this *municipio* is the other prominent indigenous language of the Huasteca Potosina, Teenek, the main form of communication. However, while official census data distinguish between only Spanish or indigenous language speakers (*hablantes de lengua indígena*), the rural populations of the *municipio* of Xilitla identify with a variety of ethnic categories, including Nahua, Teenek or the more general term *indígena*.

Following Pierre Beaucage (1994: 153), it should be noted that "in the context of the Americas Indianness or Indianness, as an identity is necessarily a postconquest phenomenon" (also see Bonfil Batalla 1987). Before the European invasion in the Americas, ethnic identity of course existed to distinguish one Indian group from another without any need to mark a boundary with European invaders. While many Nahuatl or Teenek speakers continue to consider the designation *indio* to be an insult, the term *indígena* has gained more acceptance among rural people to describe cultural differences from townspeople. Through an ongoing process of ethnic revitalization in the Huasteca region, more and more indigenous language speakers in Xilitla have recently begun to publicly identify themselves as *indígena* in order to claim an ethnic difference and to mark a clear boundary between indigenous language speakers and the townspeople of European descent,¹⁷ or rural *mestizos*.¹⁸ In this sense, the term *indígena* includes speakers of other languages and people who have lost the use of any indigenous language but who identify with the same values and share the lifestyle of a rural community. The claiming of Indianness points to an existing continuum in the material and social life among the different ethnic groups and shows an implicit or explicit distinction with *mestizos* living in the town.

The development encounter in the Huasteca Potosina leads to a proliferation of ethnic consciousness and revitalization

among local actors who reflect on the meanings of Indianness and *mestizaje* in their testimonials demonstrating both plural identities and essentialist identity claims.

Theoretical Issues in Participatory Development

Current debates in participatory development about the “myth of community” (Guijt and Shah 1998a) are an attempt to bring together parallel concerns of “gender and development” (GAD) and participatory development to redefine concrete research and planning objectives for the practice of gender-aware participatory development. Guijt and Shah (1998b: 1) underscore, however, that:

despite the stated intentions of social inclusion, it has become clear that many participatory development initiatives do not deal well with the social complexity, including age, economic, religious, caste, ethnic, and in particular gender.

The surge of ethnic movements, indigenous environmentalist movements, and indigenous human rights movements in Latin America and other areas of the world, supports the need to include ethnic identity as a pressing reality when working with indigenous populations in participatory development. In light of the recent politics of difference of the 1990s in Latin America (Hale 1996, 1997; Kearney 1996), indigenous organizations and local grassroots movements are increasingly utilizing ethnic identity and indigenous symbolism as a tool to gain access to resources, and make their voices heard in a global environment (Alvarez et al. 1998; Brysk 2000; Escobar 1997; Stephen 1991; Varese 1996a). Therefore, greater attention to ethnic identity and relations between ethnic groups and na-

tion-states is necessary in gender-sensitive participatory development.

A main concern of recent feminist development literature¹⁹ is to challenge the ongoing simplification of “the community” as a culturally and politically homogeneous entity, in order to draw attention to gender as a form of difference (Cornwall 2000; Crawley 1998; Humble 1998). Gujit and Shah (1998b: 7) underline that:

The focus of much participatory work on “community meetings” as the forum for decision-making, representing perceptions in terms of “the community map” as if only one view existed, and striving for a “single community action plan” (or village equivalents) that will somehow meet the needs of the entire community, are signs of ongoing simplification. Inequalities, oppressive social hierarchies and discrimination are often overlooked, and instead enthusiasm is generated for the cooperative and harmonious ideal promised by the imagery of the “community.”

Like the notion of “community,” Gujit and Shah (1998b: 2-3) also effectively critique the concepts of “participation” and “empowerment” that have become “buzzwords” in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methodology and practice. Both of these terms have, in the past, subsumed notions of difference and diversity within “beneficiary” groups (in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, and caste), behind the poverty alleviation agenda of development for “the poor” and “the oppressed” (see Kabeer 1999).

Since the 1990s, when “participation” was adopted as an organizing principle by mainstream development agencies (World Bank 1994) who were seeking to respond to critiques of paternalist top-down development projects (e.g., Escobar 1995; Fals Borda 1988, Rahman 1993), scholars continue to differ about what is meant by participation, participatory development, and empowerment (Crawley 1998; James 1999; Nelson

and Wright 1995; Werbner 1999). Notably, recent participatory development approaches share the concern of enabling local men and women to express and analyze their individual and shared realities in an attempt to create conditions for local analysis with PRA techniques (see Chambers 1997; Crawley 1998; Nelson and Wright 1995). In PRA rhetoric and method, "participation" ideally refers to an "...empowering process, which enables local people to do their own analysis, to take command, to gain confidence, and to make their own decisions" (Chambers 1995: 30). The idea of participation as an "empowering process" for marginalized men and women, is not only to make their voices heard and assess the social complexities of local realities, but to promote long-term shifts in power relations between local men and women, policy makers, and resource institutions (Holland and Blackburn 1998; Nelson and Wright 1995). However, the frequent use of the term "empowerment" in PRA rhetoric does not always mean that a real-life situation is "empowering." Crawley (1998: 29) states that:

unless advocates and practitioners are clear about their understanding of power and oppression, the claim that PRA is an empowering strategy is effectively meaningless. For work to be empowering, it must challenge oppression based on any form of social differentiation on which notions of superiority and inferiority have been built historically and maintained by exercising power over others.

In terms of gender, Crawley (1998: 32) notes that PRA can be "empowering" for women, only "if it explicitly challenges oppressive power relations and, as a part of this, women's marginalized and subordinated positions in society."²⁰ It follows that the concept of "empowerment" of marginalized people also assumes that there is the potential to disempower those people already in power.

Processes of economic globalization and marginalization often go hand in hand with processes of cultural domination and cultural hegemony of a nation-state over indigenous and other ethnic minorities (Young and Bort 1999: 111). As part of the indigenous reactions to the multiple dimensions of globalization,²¹ indigenous and rural peoples in Latin America have become increasingly active in their struggle for self-determination, and practice forms of ethnic revitalization to advance their claims for indigenous rights and cultural autonomy (Bonfil Batalla 1982, 1990; Kroshus Medina 1999; Montejo 1997). Hence, attention to ethnic tensions and potential conflict should be at the crux of participatory development.

The emphasis of culture-sensitive grassroots development is based on the correction of a common error in mainstream development practice, where overriding economic programs often result in a form of ethnocide for minority groups (see Hettne 1996). Instead, local decision-making, cultural pluralism, ethnic identity, and language issues are considered critical to the sociocultural and economic well-being of "beneficiaries," and to the political, economic, and social stability of multi-ethnic nation-states (see Clarke 1996; Williams 1996). With this view, ethnic identity can be considered a "precondition for harmonious development" when taken as a fundamental human right in development processes (Hettne 1996: 41). Charles Kleymeyer (1994: 21) suggests cultural expression is crucial to "weaken negative stereotypes of minority groups," which is exemplified by the testimonials of Xilitla's rural and Nahua women presented in this article. In order to contextualize local responses to a global economy at a grassroots level in Xilitla, the next section provides a brief overview of the past 20 years of shifts in Mexico's rural economy, from paternalist rural development to a restructuring of the rural sector bearing impact on rural and indigenous populations.

Mexico's Rural Economy and Agrarian Policies Since the 1980s

Mexico's financial crisis of the 1980s led to a gradual neoliberal restructuring of its economy in all sectors. The debt crisis and the drop in oil prices in 1981-1982 marked a dramatic shift from the populism of former nationalist policies to economic globalization. Older state policies that had attempted to protect domestic production and consumption gave way to economic policies intended to accommodate global capital and international trade (Barry 1995). For the people of the Mexican countryside, this shift meant the integration of the agricultural sector into a global economy regulated by global market prices, with an emphasis on profit-oriented agro-industrial structures. *Campesinos* are now facing the challenges of global commodity markets under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Before the changes of the agrarian reform in 1992, Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution had allowed for the formation of *ejidos* as community-based systems of land tenure with legal stature and usufruct rights in which the government protected community lands from the market (Barry 1995: 12). Although at first a visible triumph for the rural masses that had fought for more rights during the 1910 Revolution, the actual process of *ejido* formation, launched during the 1930s and 1940s, proved to be slow and inefficient, or misused through illegal actions.²² Unfortunately, the access to communal *ejido* lands had not been a guarantee for survival for the rural poor.²³ To compensate *ejidatarios* for insufficient income, a complex system of controls and state subsidies was put into place by governmental and parastatal agencies (e.g., subsidized staple price support through CONASUPO,²⁴ fertilizer subsidies, subsidized credit options through BANRURAL).²⁵ Although state subsidies did provide some additional help to the rural poor, a major defect was the creation of dependency and political pa-

tronage to retain control over *ejido* farmers (see De Janvry et al. 1996: 72). Over the years, land distribution and the populist agrarian policies became a political tool to gain influence over the countryside and prevent peasant unrest²⁶ (Barry 1995; Ibarra Mendivil 1996; Thiesenhusen 1996).

In 1992, an amendment to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution put an end to the agrarian reform and *ejido* land distribution program, and marked the commitment of the Mexican government to free trade and private property in the agrarian sector. The amendment opened community-held lands for privatization or rental, which ended the special status of the *ejido* and presented new challenges to rural farmers. In addition neoliberal economic reforms altered the state interventionist model of rural development. Severe malnutrition, land abandonment and increasing emigration were the first indicators of specific social consequences in many rural areas. Local reactions to these changes were manifold.²⁷

Through the course of the 1990s when malnutrition and rural poverty attained particularly high levels in Mexico, the Salinas government was forced to respond with a number of agrarian policies combining agricultural restructuring and modernization with welfare (Pronasol,²⁸ Procampo²⁹) and food assistance programs (i.e., DIF, Progresa).³⁰ In reality, the programs have often served to perpetuate the old system of political patronage, and provide insufficient assistance to marginalized communities.

Gender was not an explicit category in agrarian state policies until legal equality between men and women was established in 1971 when Article 200 of the Federal Law of Agrarian Reform allowed male and female Mexican citizens to receive land benefits³¹ (Arizpe and Botey 1987: 70). At the same time, this law was integrated into Mexican agrarian programs. In 1971, agro-industrial units for women (*Unidad Agrícola Industrial de la Mujer* [UAIM]) were created in many *ejidos*, in order to provide access for women to collectively held land plots to

be used for agricultural or agro-industrial projects (Arizpe and Botey 1987: 71).³² The UAIM was the first state initiative to create employment opportunities for rural women and to increase their direct participation in rural development. More recent initiatives to include women in the process of rural development have been developed through the Women's Solidarity Program (*Programa de Mujeres en Solidaridad*) initiated in 1989, together with the National Solidarity Program Pronasol (*Programa Nacional de Solidaridad*).

Based on an initial idea of the Salinas government to reduce state costs through increasing local level participation, local grassroots organizations and NGOs are encouraged to administer local level distribution programs (Campbell and Freedheim 1994). On the global scale, international funding agencies, such as the World Bank, provide the majority of funding. Therefore, development practitioners and agencies enter a terrain composed of multiple histories and complex power relations in which there exists a network of local, regional, and national actors.

Repercussions and Local Responses to the Agrarian Reform

In Xilitla, the situation of rural households remains precarious due to poor soil conditions of most *ejido* and indigenous lands, and the ongoing political and economic domination of big landowners, who still enjoy privileges in the commercialization of agricultural products. Among male and female *ejido* members in Xilitla, the reform of Article 27 in 1992 and related policies were received with skepticism. With respect to land tenure, the sale of *ejido* lands remains uncommon. Land rental is only practiced in large *ejidos*. The greatest challenge faced by Xilitla's *ejidatarios* has been the impossibility of obtaining more land through petitions, as coffee prices have fallen steadily in past years, and the small land plots are

insufficient to support and extended family hamlets.³³ As a consequence, the children of Xilitla's coffee farmers have increasingly been pushed out of rural areas to urban centers, border areas, or to the United States. Ideally, taking jobs in urban areas would allow these individuals to buy a small plot of farmland and establish their own households near their parents' houses, as once was the custom. Instead, many young people now leave the countryside permanently to make a living in the city and help their parents back home in Xilitla with remittances of their earnings.

The rural cooperatives have developed self-help measures to adapt to a changing economy and create new opportunities for their children. Since 1994, the two grassroots organizations of Xilitla, the men's cooperative and the women's union, are part of the Organizing Committee of Indigenous and Rural Organizations of Huasteca Potosina (*Coordinadora de Organizaciones Campesinas e Indígenas de la Huasteca Potosina*, or COCIHP). The COCIHP is composed of representatives of twelve different indigenous and rural grassroots organizations of *campesinos* who cultivate coffee, sugar cane, and citrus fruits. Through the COCIHP, the cooperatives solicit government subsidies for their economic productive projects in order to achieve better prices for their cash crops. For example, coffee cooperatives, such as *La Igualdad de Xilitla*, and the Cradle of Coffee (*La Cuna del Café*) have also adopted new marketing strategies, such as advertising of coffee over the Internet, in regional markets, and in cafes of nearby cities. Ideally, the participating indigenous and *campesino* organizations of the COCIHP exchange strategies to modify skill sets, learn from each other, and explore new ways to promote their products to gain ground for fair trade, adequate support, and respectful treatment in a globalized environment. Unfortunately, pronounced political aspirations among a few COCIHP members and their facilitators can also lead to political factionalism among cooperative members, which has in the past disturbed

the organizing work and collaboration between the participating organizations.

The Grassroots Movement in Xilitla

Early Formation: 1970s

The gendered grassroots movement in Xilitla has its roots in the early 1970s when the educational work of Paolo Freire (1973) and liberation theology played a significant role in several Catholic and Protestant churches of Latin America, as a response to oppressive measures and curtailment of economic, political, and cultural rights for rural *campesinos* and indigenous communities. In Xilitla, a group of nuns started consciousness-raising educational teachings among poor Nahuatl farmers in the early 1970s. Inspired by liberation theology, the nuns founded church-based communities and organized regular meetings in the rural villages. These meetings were concealed from the dominant class of Xilitla town. A founding member of the men's cooperative in Puerto Encinal, Don Rodolfo recalls, "the nuns (*Madres Carmelitas*) came early in the morning and left when it was dark so that no one from the town would know that they had come to talk to us." During this period, many indigenous farmers and their families began crafting ideas about confronting the economic marginalization and cultural oppression. Due to pressures of the regional *cacicazgo* (rural elite) that holds influential power over local government and church authorities in this *municipio*, the nuns were expelled from the region between 1978 and 1981.

In the early 1980s, the nuns' work was continued and expanded by a young Catholic priest, Padre Mario, who had his first appointment in Xilitla after he was ordained in 1979 by the Diocese of Ciudad Valles. The young priest worked closely with existing church-based communities of poor Nahuatl men

and women. His religious teachings were intermeshed with consciousness-raising educational work so that participating indigenous men and women gained interest not only in catechism, but also in social activism and cooperativism. Based on the idea of social and gendered equality, the priest encouraged women to take part in his classes and work together with other community members as catechists and local community organizers. For many women, this proved to be difficult as the additional task of community service interfered with their responsibilities as wives and mothers, and stood in contrast to the gendered division of labor where women were kept at home. Nonetheless, a number of Nahua and rural *mestiza* women became catechists alongside their husbands. They began to attend regular meetings and to participate in the first steps of an organizing process. For many women, participating in the educational workshops allowed them to break out of their domestic routines.

With the priest's support, the first Xilitla indigenous peasant organization started to form during the mid-1980s in the rural community of Puerto Encinal, *ejido* Tlaletla. The *campesinos* began to seek alternatives to improve their living conditions and ensure fair pay for their crops. Together with their wives, the first members of this agricultural cooperative opened small community stores with basic nutritional items to counteract the (corrupted) overpriced nutritional products for sale in CONASUPO stores. Due to sociopolitical pressures of influential families in the *municipio* of Xilitla who disapproved of the idea of organizing the *campesinos*, the priest left Xilitla in the mid-1980s. The members of the grassroots organizations still vividly remember the young priest. When I asked how the cooperatives began, Doña Felicitas, who is a catechist, an activist, and the first president of the women's union, stated in 1997:

Before he left, Padre Mario told us that he had just planted a seed. It is up to us he told us, to take care of the plant, make it grow, water it, make sure it does not die. That's what we did. It is important to be organized. It was we, the poor and humble (*humildes*) *campesinos* who continued the initiative of the cooperative. We are the people from rural communities. We do not have any money to buy food. Before the men's cooperative opened the community stores, we would go to Xilitla to buy flour, the people from the town would not sell us anything unless we also purchased soap or sugar. But now we can buy sugar for a good price in our communities. We don't have to go to town now.

In 1989, the cooperative was officially registered as an agricultural cooperative called Equality of Xilitla (*Sociedad Agropecuaria Cooperativa: La Igualdad de Xilitla*) with 268 members from 13 rural communities of Xilitla *municipio*.³⁴ In 1990, the members of the agricultural cooperative started to work on crop diversification projects for organic coffee and other self-help projects in addition to opening the rural stores. For rural men and women, working in the stores and developing new projects led to many changes in their daily lives. *Municipio*-wide organizing work and frequent trips to the town of Xilitla to buy bulk products for the rural stores led to increased mobility among male cooperative members. At that time, Nahua and rural women of Xilitla's communities were not yet official members of the cooperative, even if they worked in its stores. Doña Maximina, a Nahuatl-speaking woman who is a catechist and past president of the women's town restaurant El Comedor Popular, described her early participation to me in 1998:

When the men got organized in the cooperative, we helped each other. They [male cooperative members] built these houses that we used for the community stores. And myself, as a good wife, I started to help my husband because we did not have a road to our community yet. We all went together to carry products for the stores all the way from

Plan de Juarez. With heavy loads on our backs, men and women together! That's when I first started to go outside. That's when my husband gave me permission to go outside the home. He knew that he needed the help of his wife.

From 1989, the agricultural cooperative started to work together with advisors from a national NGO, which helped to foster the implementation of gender-sensitive grassroots development in the early 1990s.

In the case of many women's organizations in Mexico, state policy, as well as the mindset of many state officials and men in the communities, has encouraged rural women to undertake small productive projects that would go along with their roles as wives and mothers focused on "family" (Stephen 1997: 182). While those organizations primarily carry out projects that might be viewed as traditional to women's tasks in the family, the Women's Union of Xilitla had a slightly different beginning. In 1990, increased economic and cultural marginalization convinced a majority of the cooperative members that they would be able to successfully improve the living conditions of their families if women also participated in productive economic projects. In particular, the cooperative members envisioned a town restaurant in Xilitla managed by their wives to create a friendly space to rest and eat for indigenous and rural people in the town. At the same time, it can be argued that if the *raison-d'être* of the Comedor was to provide food and comfort to male members of the cooperative when they came to Xilitla, the project was related to traditional women's tasks albeit in a new setting outside the house.

Recent Activities: 1990s

In December of 1990, cooperative members invited their wives to a general meeting to brainstorm about gender-spe-

cific grassroots projects and the possibility of opening a town restaurant; 239 attended. Many women stated initial fear to follow the invitation of their husbands because many had never been outside their communities. Doña Lola, former president of the union's committee in her community Puerto Encinal, reported her initial reluctance to go:

When I went to the first women's reunion in Tlaletla I was desperate! I thought about all my work at home. I had the impression that I was always busy and that I could not just leave my domestic work like that. But my husband told me to go, so I went. And there I was very shy and felt really ashamed (*pura vergüenza*). I was scared that I would not be able to understand the others [anyone who did not speak Nahuatl].

For several hours, the women analyzed their living situation as poor indigenous *campesinas* within the context of economic crisis that had taken its effects on the coffee-growing region. Primary concerns reported by the rural and indigenous women were the nutritional levels and the high degree of malnutrition among their children. Many women at first hesitated to open a town restaurant because their responsibilities as mothers and wives did not leave them enough time to work on projects outside the home. Others voiced fear of a domestic conflict if they worked in the town away from their homes. However, familiar with the ethnic marginalization and discrimination, and interested in finding new ways to support their families, a majority of the women supported the idea of a restaurant. Moreover, they were interested in contributing their share to the cooperative work and learn new skills. They hoped to find an agreement at home and share the domestic workload with their husbands, who would take turns caring for their children.

In early 1991, the rural and indigenous women of Xilitla founded the Union of Peasant Women of Xilitla as a separate,

semi-independent organization, and elected an executive committee and various project committees. The rural and indigenous women of Xilitla started to attend workshops on alternative medicine and nutrition assisted by NGO facilitators. In August of 1991, they opened the restaurant *El Comedor Popular: La Flor del Café* (Popular Restaurant: The Coffee Flower) in Xilitla, now located next to the main market and the church in a central town location.³⁵ Doña Felicitas described the beginning of the restaurant as follows:

The restaurant was the first project of the Women's Union. And it was the most important one! I had hoped for something like this all my life. When I am at home now, I sometimes ask my husband: "How could I have done it all by myself?" Could I have taken this initiative all by myself? No, just myself, it would have been impossible! I had always dreamt about selling the meals that I like to cook. And I wanted to do something to make a little bit of money to survive. And then, when we started the Union, we helped each other, all of us together (*todas unidas*). In the beginning at the first assembly, I talked to the other women. I told them how important it was to get organized in a group, because it was the only way to achieve our goals. Yes! We had seen that without an organization, we were not going to be able to do anything. That's when we decided to open a restaurant. Everybody brought something to start off with. One woman brought some plates, another woman pots, another one brought tablecloth. ...We also wanted to learn how to work in the town. Many women said that during the first reunion. And now there are a number of women from rural communities who work in the *Comedor*.

The creation of a town-based restaurant entailed major changes in the daily domestic routines of these rural indigenous women and their families. The municipal center is not easily accessible from most rural villages. Therefore, the women decided to work weekly shifts in teams of two and stay for an

entire week in the town to operate the restaurant. Many women managed to arrange a compromise with their husbands that they would care for the children while their wives worked weekly shifts in the restaurant. When I asked *compañera* Gregoria, senior member and second president (1994-1997) of the women's union, what she remembered about the beginning of the restaurant, she recalled her initial feelings:

Kristina: Can you tell me about how you started to participate in the union?

Gregoria: We started to get organized in 1990. The men of the cooperative invited us. They said that they were missing the right arm to work effectively. Then, the women started a restaurant so that their husbands had a place to rest and eat after a long day's work. We knew that it was necessary to help our husbands. But it was quite difficult because we weren't used to leaving the house and the community. We still did it, though. Then our husbands were responsible for taking care of our children while we were gone. My children were still small, but their father took good care of them, he sent them to school and did everything! And I went to work in the *Comedor* in Xilitla. Before, we did not have any skills, nothing really. I was always at home with my children. But finally, with our organization, many things have changed. Despite all of our fears and feelings of shame (*vergüenza*)... because even to speak up we felt too shy. We were always ashamed of everything.

Kristina: How did you feel personally? Did you feel ashamed, too?

Gregoria: Yes, in the beginning I felt ashamed in the *Comedor* because of my ignorance. I did not know anything about the service in a restaurant. I was scared to talk to clients. But I still went and that's how I learned a lot. I lost my fear little by little. It was a nice thing to learn new skills because when I was small, there weren't many schools around. I only knew how to write a little bit. With the Union, we learned how to do calculations, how to write, how to read, how to have meetings. We liked that a lot.

The *compañeras* of the Women's Union serve local foods and low priced meals in their town restaurant *El Comedor*, which they manage independently. The opening of this restaurant has been a critical factor in creating a constant presence and visibility of rural indigenous people in the town of Xilitla, which until recently had been dominated by *mestizo* townspeople. The members of Xilitla's indigenous and *campesino* cooperatives have a central place to eat and rest, and to hold project meetings. On Sundays in particular, the restaurant *El Comedor* is a place to get together with friends and cooperative members from other communities. Since 2000, *El Comedor* even has a telephone where *campesinos* can receive long distance phone calls for a small fee. For many senior members of the grassroots organizations, this is a way to keep in touch with their children who work in Mexican cities or on the other side of the United States/Mexican border, without having to pay a per minute fee to receive calls.

Other Women's Union projects also require more mobility and participation in the larger world. The rural and indigenous women work on projects in their communities and attend regular meetings in neighboring villages or in the municipal town. Former treasurer Maria reflected back on her position:

Kristina: Can you tell me about the beginning of your work? How did you get started? How was the relationship with your husband?

Maria: When we began the Union, my husband was convinced that it was a good thing. And it was my husband who allowed me to participate. "Go there" he told me. And I went to the first meeting carrying my youngest daughter. There were a lot of women just like me. ... But it is very difficult for a woman to get involved in the Union. It is not easy to go out to other communities every day because we also have to do our domestic work. We can participate, but our work at home cannot be left behind. One has to feed the children. All of this is very important to

make sure that the household (*el matrimonio*) is in peace. In order to accept a position in the Union, the household has to be on good terms first. ...And then, one should be enthusiastic (*tener ganas*) about the work and take the time to do it. It is a service for the others. I always said that if we work in an organization, it is our service to the community. We follow the message of the Lord: "You have to serve your neighbor." That's it, it is important to help even without making money. That's how I understand it. I want to (*tengo ganas*) participate in order to help the others, without or with a salary.

Over the years, the women's union has initiated various small, productive economic projects similar to family-centered schemes of other women's organizations in Mexico that are mainly tied to domestic needs. Currently, the women organize six different types of projects that operate in about 12 different rural communities: Nutrition, alternative medicine, mechanical corn mills, community vegetable gardening, chicken farms, and community stores³⁶; all are examples of the Union's productive economic and self-help projects. All the projects pursue the goals of increasing health and nutrition, improving the production of nutritious foods, and provide employment for families from rural communities. These community projects complement government welfare programs. For example, the nutrition promoters of the Women's Union carry out a project in the rural communities of Xilitla. The union members in charge of food projects agreed with DIF state officials to regularly monitor the weight of all local children of their respective communities, and to distribute subsidized food rations (*papillas*) from the Institute of Nutrition to needy families. Although the subsidized food rations are greatly appreciated by rural families, many women reported in 1998 that *papillas* do not provide enough nourishment to support their families and sometimes the products arrive to Xilitla already spoiled. To increase the nutritional level of their families through grassroots

initiatives, the women also started local community bakeries and collective cornfields.

For many women who joined the union during recent years, it was not always easy to convince their husbands to let them participate in the organization. *Compañera* Carmerina shared her story with me in 1997. Her brother, who was a member of the men's cooperative, invited her in 1994 to participate in the Union's corn mill project in the community of Pilateno. Since her husband was not a member of the cooperative, it was more difficult for her to get permission to work outside her home and join the Union. When I asked her how she felt in 1997³⁷ after finding an agreement with her husband, she placed emphasis on a gain in personal freedom:

Before I joined the Union, it was difficult for me to make friends. It was difficult because I was never allowed to leave the house. I did not have permission from my husband to go outside. The rule was what my husband said: "You are not allowed to go see your parents. You cannot go to have fun (*ir a una diversión*) somewhere." My husband did not even let me visit my mother who lives nearby. This was a very painful experience for me. I always had to be inside. If I had to be today without my friends [of the Union], I could not be happy anymore. Now I tell my *compañeras* who are my friends that, before joining the Union, I felt like a little bird trapped inside a cage. Now with the organization, I feel like a little bird who was set free from her cage and who can go wherever she wants to... over here... or there, to look for a little bug to eat, to feel the wind. Now I feel free.

This was a recurring theme in my interviews with Nahua and rural *mestiza* women of the Union conducted in 1997 and 1998. Doña Maximina also clearly stated significant changes that her participation has provoked in terms of challenging gender inequality and opening new horizons:

Kristina: Would you say that your life as a woman has changed since the organizations started? How?

Maximina: The men always wanted the women to be locked up inside (*encerrada*). When I got married, I was told that a woman has to be subordinate to the husband (*abajo del esposo*). Locked up in the house as if she was a slave (*esclavizada*). I behaved just like that, waiting for my husband, preparing coffee, a couple of tortillas or a chili dish for him to eat when he came home. I did not know anything around here because I was always inside. We, as women, were always very obedient. But when the men got together in the cooperative, as a good wife, I started to help my husband a little bit and that's when I started to get outside more. Before joining the union, I felt that women had no value, that we had no value: that the *campesinas* or rural women, who live far away from the town were not valued. The men did not appreciate our housework. Now, we go outside the house to work on the projects with the community and this means that we have even more work to do than just housework. The difference is that our work is much better now because our husbands help us and cherish our work.

The statements of the *compañeras* suggest that the participation in the rural Women's Union has led to significant changes in the women's lives at home and in the *municipio*. While the projects of the Women's Union do not generate enough income to be considered economically empowering, and the women have largely worked in community service, most women interviewed in 1997 and 1998 thought that simply participating in workshops and carrying out their projects resulted in challenges to gender relations, personal freedom, and to their marginal status as rural indigenous women. Most of the women interviewed also underlined that their work in the Union allowed them to build a *municipio*-wide community among indigenous and rural women, along with their husbands.

Complementary to projects of the Women's Union, the agricultural cooperative *La Igualdad* focuses its efforts on productive projects concerned with agriculture and the commercialization of their cash crop: coffee. In 1997, cooperative members started working with NGO advisors and *Alianza para el Campo* on a project to switch to the high-value crop of organic coffee. Although this process is slow,³⁸ the rural producers hope that in the long run they will obtain better prices for their product on an open market. These *campesinos* are aware of the fact that they have to learn new skills to adapt to a global market. Organic coffee is an example of this. The product must be handled in certain ways, in order to comply with national and international rules for certified organic products. The cooperative offers workshops for rural producers to learn organic production techniques in order to successfully conform to the standards of an open market. More recently, cooperative members also started producing a more value-added product, a roasted and ground indigenous coffee brand, along with other small rural coffee producers of the region in the COCIHP.

The two rural indigenous grassroots organizations of Xilitla discussed here practice a gender-sensitive model of participatory grassroots development. They work closely together in order to identify the needs of their communities, and implement local solutions adapted to their gendered areas of knowledge through community-based decision-making and collective action. Though the organizations are officially separate from one another, they simultaneously continue to be interrelated as many of their members are in fact married couples. The excerpts indicate in particular that a consensus is necessary between husband and wife as a prerequisite for this type of gender-sensitive grassroots development. Many women also highlighted the fact that they had been invited by their husbands to begin the town restaurant and work in projects started by their own organization. In a gender-sensitive grassroots model, it is indispensable that each organization has its own

areas of expertise, administers its own budget, sustains and establishes linkages with national programs or institutions, and maintains contact with national and international organizations. Differential participation is a vital factor in increasing the chances for successful grassroots development for men and women in the community (Kaufman 1997). The creation of two separate organizations and the differential participation in gender-specific projects effectively diminishes problems of exclusion in decision-making that has been observed elsewhere in mixed organizations (see Stephen 1997).

Gender, Ethnic Identity, and Empowerment

The social complexity of local realities is manifested with respect to ethnic identity constructions of Xilitla's grassroots members. Excerpts of interviews with Women's Union members presented in this section address their shared memory of ethnic discrimination, and feelings of ethnic empowerment through their work in the grassroots organizations. In 1996, Women's Union members gave a presentation on an indigenous radio station XEANT of the Huasteca region to spread the word about their organization. An excerpt of this presentation from the archive of the Women's Union describes the social complexity of their experiences as indigenous and rural women:

We are indigenous women (*mujeres indígenas*) who speak Nahuatl, Teenek, Pame and other languages. We have customs (*costumbres*) that help us, such as our community service, our culture, our identity, our language, the respectful treatment for the environment and for humans, and our caring for our children as we teach them from an early age to treat others with respect.

There are customs that help us and customs that bring us pain, such as the custom that marriages are often ar-

ranged without asking the girl. From our early childhood on, we have always experienced oppression and we have always suffered. We have to work without compensation and without having our work valued by others. Our life has been very difficult because of our poverty and the lack of employment. We are the ones who are most humiliated by *mestizos*. We have not had the same opportunities as they had, and we have a disadvantage because it is difficult for us to speak Spanish (Castilla), we are afraid to ask (*da pena*).

When a girl is born, the men are unhappy (*se disgustan*) and they blame the woman. Our life is difficult from early on because we suffer when carrying water, carrying our little brothers, we make tortillas from early childhood on, and often we walk barefoot because only rich women (*las ricas*) can pay for sandals. Today as adults, we suffer when there are meetings and we cannot attend because our husbands do not give us permission to go. We do not have money to buy something to eat. Many times we have to walk long distances because we lack the money to pay for transportation.

As indigenous women, we have searched for a way to get organized together with the support of our husbands. Through the projects of our organization, we have learned how to speak in public, lose our fears, value ourselves (*sentir valor*), and mobilize together. We ask to be respected as an organization of indigenous women because we have gained a lot of experience with other organizations, and people from other places. However, despite our community work and participation in the organization, our people continue to be very poor. We lack more support. We need to solicit support for our needs because we have not received enough help from the authorities. We know that it is important to get organized, fight (*luchar*) and get together in organizations. We know that it is important to love our work and our cooperation with others. It is also important that we love each other (*amarnos*), that we stay healthy, and that we set a good example through our cooperative work so that other women notice how we progress together and value cooperative work. For that reason, we invite other *compañeras* to participate in our organization, to work together with us in order to learn new skills, such as bak-

ing bread, growing vegetables, practicing alternative medicine, and respecting each other's responsibilities (*cargos*). If we are unified, we can go forward (*Unidas podemos avanzar mucho*)! (1996 Radio Presentation of the Unión de Mujeres Campesinas de Xilitla, Radio Indígena de la Huastecas.)

This transcript sheds light on the women's experiences of triple oppression in terms of cultural discrimination, female subordination, and economic marginalization before their involvement in the grassroots organization as well as their recognition of ethnic and gendered empowerment as organized indigenous and *campesina* women. In the first part of the presentation, the women directly speak about their subordinate socio-economic status as poor *campesinas* who live in precarious living conditions, they describe the subordination of women by local men, and emphasize their suffering of ethnic discrimination by *mestizos*.

The *municipio* of Xilitla is characterized by a "racialized geography" that creates boundaries and hierarchical relationships between inhabitants of rural communities and townspeople (Cadena 2001: 21). In the interviews, many men and women specifically referred to discriminatory language as a form of cultural marginalization and racism of townspeople vis-à-vis rural and indigenous populations of Xilitla. *Compañera* Maria de Jesús talked to me about moments of oppression at school and describes her experience of indigenous revitalization within the grassroots movement:

Kristina: Have you experienced discrimination as an indigenous woman in your life? How?

Maria de Jesús: Before we started the cooperatives, the government did not want our Nahuatl language to be used anymore. Only Spanish. In school, other children looked down at us because we did not know how to speak Spanish. I felt discriminated. I felt ashamed to speak Nahuatl.

The others laughed at us. Today, many of our children have lost their language— our language. Only when I joined the organization, I discovered that I was wrong not to speak my language anymore. Today, I feel better with the organization because as an indigenous woman, I have been given the opportunity to participate and to continue to practice our culture and our language. Even if the government does not want to recognize our presence very much, we are part of the society. In fact, we are the real ones here from Mexico (*Somos los meros de aquí de México*). The indigenous people, we are the real Mexicans!

Similar to her experience, many families in the rural communities of Xilitla stopped speaking Nahuatl at home to make their children learn Spanish as their first language in order to avoid the painful experiences of cultural discrimination at school and in the town. In the past 10 years, indigenous language use has become an important vehicle of cultural expression in the grassroots movement of Xilitla that engendered feelings of ethnic empowerment and cultural revitalization. On the one hand, rural indigenous men and women now increasingly use Nahuatl at meetings, with their children, and in public in the municipal town. On the other hand, learning Spanish was also an important accomplishment for many women of the union. *Compañera* Lola highlights that learning Spanish opened new horizons and has become a tool to argue for more rights. Overall, her participation in the Union has made a big change in her life, not only as a woman, but also as an indigenous person:

Kristina: How is your life as an indigenous woman? Has it changed since you started to work in the organization?

Lola: I am indigenous because I live in this community here [where Nahuatl is used for daily conversation among adults]. With regard to those who are not indigenous, we really felt lower than them. Before [the organization started], we felt that we had no value. But now, I don't

think the same way anymore. For example, when I first went to Xilitla to register my oldest son, I was scared to go there because I did not understand their language. I felt ashamed because I could not speak Spanish. But now, I can speak Spanish and I have learned many new things. ... As indigenous people, we finally woke up (*nos despertamos*). We have more value because we know our rights and we can defend ourselves. ...As an indigenous woman, I felt a big change in my life. My life is much more pleasant. As indigenous women, we also woke up a little bit (*nos despertamos un poquito*). Before getting organized, we did not realize that an indigenous woman had the same value as a mestiza. But today, I know that we are equal to those who are not indigenous. And the same is true for men and women. We are all equals (*Somos todos iguales*).

Compañera Gregoria was the second president of the Union. Her narrative highlights similar issues about cultural discrimination and feelings of shame about her indigenous heritage before joining the Union, and feelings of empowerment from working for the grassroots organization:

Kristina: How do you feel about your heritage? Has it made a difference in your life?

Gregoria: I am indigenous (*Yo soy indígena*). Before joining the Union I always felt bad about my heritage. In my husband's community where I live now, I can never converse in my language Nahuatl [because the community is predominantly *mestizo*]. And it is true, when I first got here, many of the people looked down on me, they called me the "Indian" women (*la India*). I felt ashamed. I thought that I was not at their level, that I was not valued. Maybe that was because I did not speak like them. Only little by little, I started to understand their words. But still, I feel like an indigenous women. I am together with my indigenous sisters. Even if sometimes I speak Spanish with them because I got used to speaking Spanish. ...Now, with the Union, I know that as an indigenous woman, I am capable of doing many things. I am very proud of our projects.

Together with the other *compañeras* of the Union, I know that I have value. I am happy in this organization because it feels like a big family. As if we all were brothers and sisters. No one is bigger or smaller. We are all equals. ... We have learned many new skills and we know how to defend ourselves. Even as women we know how defend ourselves.

While the quotes emphasize shared experiences and a collective memory of oppression, marginalization, and subordination of indigenous people, the ethnic composition of the grassroots organization is diverse. According to the excerpts quoted above, self-identification as indigenous people seems primarily linked to indigenous language use, when in fact not all of the cooperative and union members speak an indigenous language anymore.

There are differences between women and differences between men in Xilitla's grassroots organizations based on ethnic or socioeconomic background. In addition to language use, shared experiences of cultural customs (*costumbres*), subsistence practices, and the link to the community are also important factors of identification with indigenous heritage. Many rural women who do not speak an indigenous language today self-identify as indigenous women based on their shared experiences of cultural discrimination and economic marginalization experienced by rural people in this *municipio*. Interviews conducted with *campesinas* of the Women's Union indicate that plural identity constructions are common. For example, Doña Felicitas calls herself a *mestiza* based on the fact that she does not speak an indigenous language. On the other hand, she self-identifies as an indigenous woman because she grew up in a rural community and her husband's first language is Nahuatl.

I am *mestiza* because my parents are from [the state of] Querétaro. My father was Otomí but he died early and that is why I never learned his language. With my hus-

band [who speaks Nahuatl as his first language], I never speak Nahuatl but I have started to understand him. Nonetheless, I feel like an indigenous woman because I live among them and because I come from a race (*una raza*), and a language (*una lengua*), the Otomí language. Even if my language is not Nahuatl, my blood and my race (*mi raza*) are Otomí. I feel Indian because of the “*Indio*.” I feel proud [*me siento orgullosa*] when people call me “India.” Why should I be proud? Because if they call me “India,” I feel that the word “Indian” has a lot of value. I don’t get mad when they [townspeople] call me “India.” On the contrary, I tell them that it is good. I tell my *compañeras* that they should not be sad if they are called “India.” But in the beginning [before we started our organization], indigenous culture (*la cultura indígena*) was not valued. Nahuatl was not valued. The government did not want Nahuatl language to persist. We all had to learn Spanish in school. And there were other forms of oppression, as when the Spanish people did not tolerate our typical clothing such as the white cotton pants of Nahua men. This is why we have to save our indigenous culture and revive it again!

In Mexico, citizens are usually classified by set categories, such as indigenous language use and traditional clothing. In Xilitla, a person or community is classified as “indigenous” if an indigenous language is used as their first language. The statement by Felicitas suggests that there are other important factors that make up the social complexity of local realities, such as living in a rural community, indigenous cultural descent, shared histories, and collective memories of discrimination.

Discussion

I have suggested that ethnic identity should be prioritized or placed equally with gender in the development encounter.

The testimonials of the women demonstrate that empowerment is not only a result of gender-aware grassroots organizing but the revitalization of local values and languages as well. The narratives highlight the situational nature of ethnic identity as a political and strategic choice influenced by development programs and political agendas. The grassroots encounter results in an empowering experience in this particular case as the local men and women identify and address social and ethnic tensions, discriminatory language and oppressive relationships with townspeople.

The question I refer to is how gender and ethnic identity are intertwined and offer complementarity and contradictions in the development encounter. The testimonials of the *compañeras* demonstrate that experiences of oppression are linked to their status as poor, indigenous, and rural women. The *compañeras* emphasize that their experiences of humiliation and discrimination as poor rural and indigenous Nahua women only adds to oppressive gender relations in the home. It follows that a participatory development encounter needs to address the triple oppression as indigenous and poor *campesina* women to resolve any contradictions, and in order to render the grassroots organizing an empowering experience.

Thus far, the women's work in productive economic projects has not been economically empowering in terms of generating enough income to sustain a family. However, the women's voices highlight that their involvement has resulted in significant changes in their lives as rural and Nahuatl women shifting unequal gender relations, increasing their personal freedom and participation in the larger world, and decreasing their political marginality. Two aspects have been significant factors in rendering the grassroots initiative an empowering experience for these Nahua and rural *mestizo* men and women in the Huasteca region: First, the differential participation in two intertwined yet independent gendered grassroots organizations with complementary projects, and second, local deci-

sion-making, collective action, and indigenous language use, which started a process of ethnic revitalization that sustains the grassroots development as an ongoing process. This revitalization has led to a proud assertion of indigenous identities as Nahua or *indígena* among the majority of grassroots members. The definitions of Indianness (*ser indígena*) are not only plural, but inclusive as they allow *mestizoized campesinos* to identify with indigenous cultural value based on shared lifestyles in precarious conditions.

The point is not to question empowerment issues in participatory development, but rather to assert that power negotiations occur within a space that is culturally constructed, and with complex actors whose opportunities are frequently derived from aspects of the social and symbolic world that are largely regarded as peripheral to participatory development itself. Therefore, it is indispensable to look at constructions of ethnic boundaries and identities in the development encounter. In Xilitla, the fluidity of concepts as indigenous, *campesino*, or *mestizo* shows aspects of identity negotiations of local men and women in a globalized environment. Clearly, categories of ethnic identity and *mestizaje* in Xilitla grassroots organizing are based on processes of self-identification that demonstrate plural identity constructions. Close analysis renders the situation considerably more complex. Why do local men and women choose to self-identify as *campesino*, Nahua, indigenous, or *mestizo* in the first place, and how does it affect their experience in participatory development? Recent agrarian policies and development programs in Mexico tend to directly target certain focus groups such as small-scale agriculturalists or *campesinos*, and women. However, the ambiguity of the categories *campesino*, *indígena*, and *mestizaje* in some testimonials suggest complex realities and relational identity constructions of ethnic Nahua, indigenous or *mestizo* men and women of Xilitla's rural communities.

Differential meanings of *mestizaje* and Indianness influence the women's identity constructions. In Latin America, both concepts (*mestizaje* and Indianness) can have multiple meanings and exist in differently positioned people in a given space and time (Hale 1996). In Xilitla, *mestizaje* is mainly deployed to mark a clear contrast between *mestizoized* rural people who refuse to speak an indigenous language and identify with lifestyles of townspeople and indigenous language speakers who identify with an indigenous language and culture. In this definition of *mestizaje*, the concept follows the dominant discourse and elite ideology that has promoted *mestizaje* as the unifying myth during the nation-building time after the revolution (Hale 1996; Bonfil Batalla 1990). The grassroots members deploy elite definitions of *mestizaje* from an indigenous perspective. In this view, *mestizaje* takes on a negative connotation as *mestizos* were the oppressors of indigenous culture. Instead of buying the homogenizing political visions that downplay difference, the testimonials show that ethnic difference holds potential for a creative renewal. The women affirm cultural difference and revalorize indigenous societies by underlining their cultural and ethnic distinctiveness from *mestizos*. At the same time, the concept of *mestizaje* reflects a historical process of cultural and ethnic mixing. It allows for plural meanings (simultaneity or layering) of *mestizo* and indigenous identities in one person at a given moment in time. Following Bonfil Batalla (1990), this understanding of *mestizaje* views the *mestizo* as a de-Indianized Indian who expresses his or her Indian consciousness in a process of developing a new form of Indian consciousness. In Xilitla, non-indigenous language speakers affirm proud feelings of Indianness as a result of ethnic empowerment. *Mestizoized*, non-indigenous language speaker Doña Felicitas for instance, starts to identify as indigenous or Indian in the process of the revitalization of indigenous societies.

The category *indígena* is applied at least in two ways in this research population: to identify parallel histories of oppression and discrimination among indigenous language speakers and people of indigenous descent who share a lifestyle and to display a communal ethnic identity based on a shared Nahuatl heritage. The latter could be understood as an essentialist and homogenized ethnic identity construction that cuts across ethnic boundaries and ethnic heterogeneity across Mexico. Stefano Varese (1996b) observed that, in the context of the Americas, a dialectical relationship exists between an assumed communal ethnic identity and a wider definition of ethnic identity that includes all people native to the Americas. This type of pan-Indianismo, defined as the affirmation of one Indian civilization of Native American people unified to transcend the diversity of different languages and people throughout Latin America (Bonfil Batalla 1990), has been observed in various indigenous organizations. This phenomenon implies the formation of ethnic and class consciousness. In Xilitla, it would be premature to speak of a pan-Indian consciousness *strictu sensu*. Nonetheless, the testimonials demonstrate the beginning of an ethnic consciousness and politicization of indigenous culture that crosses language boundaries and subsumes ethnic differences among regional indigenous groups.

For the women of the union, claiming Indianness has become an empowering strategy deployed to contrast former dominant colonial definitions and to shift ethnic boundaries according to local conditions. The development encounter in Xilitla represents a terrain of political contestation in which grassroots members redefine meanings of ethnic labels and claim rights to equal citizenship.

Conclusion

In an era where multilateral development agencies adopt gender as a primary concept in their policy research (World Bank 2001; Katz and Correia 2001), it is important to underline that "gender is not the only difference nor is it the main difference that affects people's opinions and choices" (Cornwall 1998: 50; Chambers 1997: 183; Schrijvers 1995: 21). The complex local realities of rural and indigenous people in Mexico defy any simplification of "the community" as a homogeneous entity but open new perspectives on the fluidity of categories and plural identities. Their testimonials on their experience in the gender- and culture-sensitive grassroots organizations of Xilitla challenge the "myth" of community.

The analysis I have posed here seeks to mediate positions emphasizing complementarity and contradiction in grassroots development through attention to the specific constructions of gender and ethnic identity derived from the power relations inscribed in the development encounter. Nahua men and women both face real problems in their everyday lives, problems that not only emerge in domestic relationships with their counterpart of the other gender, but result from economic and political history of oppression constituting differential relationships of power.

The 20-year history of rural and indigenous men and women who participate in Xilitla's grassroots organizations demonstrates the beginning of an ongoing empowering process. While the early years of their involvement have resulted in a gain in confidence and personal freedom, increased political decision-making, and access to resources, it is yet to be determined whether this grassroots movement stands for "participation as an end" where local people shape their own process of development (Nelson and Wright 1995). It seems true so far, that the members of the grassroots organizations of the Huasteca Potosina have developed local strategies in order to

adapt to constantly changing global economic circumstances that are, for the most part, out of their control. In order to manage the severe effects of economic marginalization and cultural discrimination, the grassroots organizations cooperate with each other, engage in a regional network of *campesino* organizations, and cooperate with a number of rural development and welfare programs. At the same time, they evaluate, appropriate, or reject development projects in accord with their respective histories and / or create complementary independent community service projects to assist the needs of their families.

Yet processes of empowerment in grassroots development are not without contradictions. Undoubtedly, participatory development processes are long and slow, and bear many hurdles for their protagonists. In Xilitla, the empowerment of rural and indigenous men and women has not been a smooth transition, and conflictive situations have arisen between men and women and between local members and outsiders. Then again, development can have more dramatic consequences, such as political repression or ethnic conflict. According to the new development paradigm that involves independent organizations as well as government programs (Zaidi 1999), participatory development at the grassroots level is a process that draws in a number of actors who work together in a dialogue to promote structural changes of unequal power relations that empower people who historically have been silenced and excluded from access to power. The grassroots movement of the Huasteca demonstrates that despite ongoing tensions and conflict situations only continued support, persistence, and long-term participation can result in an empowering experience for its participants that may ultimately lead to wider structural changes.

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NOTES

- 1 "Campesino sector" refers to the rural sector of subsistence farmers and small-scale agriculturalists.
- 2 *Mestizoization* is apparent through the use of Western-style clothing, Spanish as primary language, and non-traditional occupational activities such as storekeeping, taxi driving, and migratory work in urban areas.
- 3 National Census data from 1995 (INEGI 1995) shows 17,547 indigenous language speakers (five years and older) in the total area of the municipio, of which 16,646 were reported as Nahuatl speakers.
- 4 Following the agrarian reform under Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, *ejidos* were created after the Mexican Revolution to respond to the demands of landless peasants. An *ejido* is a community-based land tenure to which members have usufruct rights for cultivation usually on individual land plots (Stephen 1997: 160). The government protected the privately held parcels and communal lands from the market. Ejido land could not be sold, rented, or

- bought until an amendment of Article 27 in 1992, which opened the way for *ejido* privatization or rental (Barry 1995: 12).
- 5 In the *municipio* of Xilitla, an *ejido* usually holds a number of localities, generally referred to rural communities pertaining to an *ejido*. Non-*ejido* villages are also referred to as rural communities, which are occasionally subdivided in smaller localities or *barrios* (hamlets). I use the term rural community when referring to rural hamlets of the *municipio*.
- 6 In the wider Huasteca Potosina, the main economic activities in the lower areas are large-scale cattle farms, and citrus and sugar cane monoculture. Coffee cultivation and tree foresting are predominant at higher elevations.
- 7 Sugar cane and oranges constitute the main source of income for *campesinos* of neighboring areas, such as in the *municipios* of Huehuetlán, Coxcatlán, and Tancanhuitz, which are located in lower altitudes of the Huasteca Potosina.
- 8 Particularly heavy winters with high frost in the 1960s and 1989-1990 led to an increased abandonment of small land plots and crop changes in the higher altitudes of the Huasteca regions.
- 9 Households in the rural villages of Xilitla *municipio* are family-based economies. Similar to other studies of the gendered division of labor in Mexico (Eber 1995; Mathews 1993; Rosenbaum 1993; Stephen 1991), complementary interdependencies and the overlapping of gendered tasks characterize the rural household economies in Xilitla municipality (Tiedje 1998). In addition to reproductive tasks, food preparation, sweeping, storekeeping, and the raising of small animals, women regularly take on agricultural responsibilities, especially during planting and harvesting seasons. Although male gender tasks concentrate on cash crop and corn cultivation, trading, and butchering, men occasionally help out in the home with food preparation during fiesta times, when large masses of food have to be prepared. Children also contribute to the household economy by helping their parents in various tasks, such as firewood gathering, animal-feeding, and food preparation.
- 10 The Huasteca was invaded and annexed to New Spain under the name of Provincia Pánuco by Hernán Cortés in the end of 1522. Later, the Spanish Crown founded an independent government under the new governor Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán who remained in office from 1527 to 1533. Given the lack of gold and silver mines in the region, both Cortés and Guzmán started a massive slave enterprise trading native Huastecan people in exchange for cattle

- from the Caribbean islands (Herrera 1999: 7; Ruvalcaba and Pérez 1996: 21).
- 11 The Republica de Indios was a colonial institution introduced to the Huasteca in 1532. Local mayors (*regidores* or *alcaldes*) who were in charge of collecting colonial tributes, and administered the indigenous communities then recognized as semi-autonomous Indian Republics. While this institution also facilitated oppression as it organized the extraction of tributes, the disappearance of the Indian Republic marked a loss of autonomy for indigenous communities in the Huasteca area and this loss provoked the re-acquisition of power of the *cacicazgo* (Indian elites) over the indigenous communities, which remains strong until today (Ruvalcaba and Pérez, 1996: 30).
- 12 Bilingual kindergardens and elementary schools exist in roughly one third of Xilitla's rural communities in 2002. Nonetheless, most of the bilingual schoolteachers follow the general guideline to instruct indigenous speakers in the primary language Spanish instead of promoting oral and written Nahuatl.
- 13 To avoid confusion, I refer to them as rural *mestizos*.
- 14 In Mexico, it is customary to speak of *mestizaje* or *mestizoization* when people adopt more Western values while in Guatemala and other Mesoamerican countries the term *ladinoization* describes a similar phenomenon.
- 15 *Respeto* (respect) is an important concept in indigenous and rural communities. For instance, respect for the elder and for the community population is demonstrated through appropriate greeting rituals, honorific formulas when addressing a particular person as well as gift exchange. Some male school teachers are also known as heavy drinkers and are not shy to go to the rural cantinas (little stores where beer is sold) after school. Female teachers are sometimes criticized for dressing inappropriately.
- 16 Huasteco is the designation Nahuatl speakers use to describe Teenek speakers and to describe the regional cultural tendencies. Teenek speakers themselves generally use the term Teenek to describe their local language and culture.
- 17 Xilitla has had a large influx of European immigrants from Italy and Spain during the time of the industrial revolution in the late 19th century.
- 18 The indigenous radio station XEANT that has been presenting a program of indigenous music, culture, and language out of a neighboring municipio of Tancanhuitz since 1994, has contributed to valorize the term *indígena* in the Huasteca region.

- 19 The attention to women, or gender and development, is not new in development theory and methodology. In the 1970s, feminist scholars started to criticize the marginalization of women in the international institutions during postwar development (Scott 1996; Staudt 1998). Subsequently, various schools developed into different strands of theory and practice, of which GAD is one of the major stands (for detailed discussion see Jackson and Pearson 1998; Østergaard 1992; Peet and Hartwick 1999). GAD is particularly concerned with issues of power and control in an effort to transform oppressive gender relations.
- 20 Alcohol abuse and domestic violence are examples of gender related conflicts (Whitehead and Bloom 1992: 51-54).
- 21 Following Rodriguez Gómez (2000: 32), globalization is understood in this article as a "heterogeneous process constructed by actors who struggle, negotiate, and accommodate to reduce uncertainty and to increase their share of power." This process works in two ways. On the one hand, dominant groups attempt to impose their worldview on subordinate groups. On the other hand, subordinate groups oppose, appropriate, or modify these forms of domination according to their own experiences and their limited options (Rodriguez Gómez 2000: 33).
- 22 After an initial success in the 1950s, *ejidos* entered a phase of stagnation that led to an impoverishment of many *ejido* members. The rising cost of state subsidies also demonstrated the economic failure of the system (see De Janvry et al. 1996).
- 23 Poor soil conditions and the marginalization of small-scale farming during the expansion of capitalist agriculture made it difficult for subsistence and small-scale farmers to gain a living wage based on farming alone (Stephen 1997: 161).
- 24 CONASUPO stands for National Company for Subsistence Products (*Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares*). CONASUPO stores were open in rural communities and *ejidos* to buy and sell price-subsidized staple foods and subsistence crops. Since this subsidy proved inefficient and costly, many stores were closed in 1999.
- 25 BANRURAL stands for the National Bank of Rural Credit (*Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural*).
- 26 Until recently this strategy fostered support for the former government party PRI in the rural areas of Mexico. However, peasant movements took place in various rural areas particularly in the 1970s, which clearly voiced their protest against the manipulatory agrarian policies of the state (e.g., Schryer 1990).

- 27 Specific case studies indicate a variety of adaptive mechanisms to a global economy among small-scale producers, such as the sale and rental of *ejido* plots (see Mummert 2000), a shift from traditional grain crops to high-value crops (Marsh and Runsten 2000), changes in production methods to increase competitiveness (Rodríguez Gómez 2000), the gradual abandonment of the smallest land plots (*minifundios*), and increasing numbers of migrant labor and off-farm incomes (De Janvry et al. 1996).
- 28 Pronasol (*Programa Nacional de Solidaridad*) was started in 1989. It is a social poverty alleviation program with projects for education, health, transportation, and regional development. Funded by a combination of state revenues and the funds from multilateral development banks, Pronasol is directed to build new roads, schools, clinics, electric power lines, and many other projects in marginalized areas (see Cornelius et al. 1994).
- 29 Procampo (*Programa de Apoyo Directos al Campo*) was introduced in 1993 as a transitional subsidy program to compensate grain farmers for the loss of price supports, input subsidies, and import protection. Procampo is 15-year program of direct payments to farmers who produce basic commodities. These payments are intended to help them during the transitional phase of Mexico's agricultural economy. Payments are scheduled to end in 2008.
- 30 The DIF (National Program for the Integral Development of the Family), a food assistance program for rural poor who live in extreme poverty operating since 1972; LICONSA, a project that has provided milk subsidy payments for children's health since 1965; DICONSA, a project of rural stores with subsidized prices for commodity products since 1972; FIDELIST, a trust fund for tortilla subsidy payments operating since 1990; and Progresa (Health, Education and Nutrition Program), the most recent food assistance and welfare program initiated in 1997. Progresa links food, health, and education. It provides rural breakfasts for children and lactating mothers in urban and rural areas of extreme poverty and requires participants to see health officials and attend educational seminars on nutrition and health.
- 31 Lourdes Arizpe and Carlota Botey (1987: 70) emphasize "the 1920 *ejido* law—the first piece of legislation to establish that land should be distributed equitably among heads of households—made no mention of women." A head of household was generally assumed to be male, until in 1971, when women could become female *ejido* members by law (*ejidatarias*).

- 32 The UAIMs functioned as local cooperatives subsidized by government funds for maize grinding, tortilla shops, poultry farms, canning operations, and handicrafts. Remuneration of participating members of the UAIMs was based on the surplus income from sales. Although most studies show that women's involvement in UAIM projects has improved women's status and access to political decision-making, it is widely agreed that these small enterprises are not commercially viable (Arizpe and Botey 1987; Labrecque 1998; Stephen 1997). Problems with the UAIMs were often from economic disappointment together with other conflicts, such as political factionalism or village rivalries.
- 33 In 2000, the *campesinos* of Xilitla *municipio* made only four to six Mexican pesos per kilogram (roughly 20 or 30 US cents per pound). In addition to the coffee price deflation, very cold winters in 1989-1990 and 1997-1998 destroyed most of the harvest in high altitudes, or at least substantially deteriorated the bean quality.
- 34 The number of 268 members of the agricultural cooperative refers only to the male head of a household who became registered members, even if their wives put many hours of volunteer labor into the work of the community stores in addition to their responsibilities at home as wives and mothers.
- 35 The original location was a little further away from the main plaza.
- 36 The Nahua and rural *mestiza* women of the Union operate most of the rural stores, which were initially started together with the agricultural cooperative. In addition, they have opened new stores in the years between 1993 and 1996.
- 37 Currently, the situation for Union members in Pilateno is more precarious as many women left the organization due to health reasons or pregnancy. In 2002, only three women operate the corn mill and Carmerina mentioned that she sometimes asks her husband to pay for the fuel to run the mill.
- 38 A field must be chemical-free for three consecutive years until the *campesinos* can plant certified organic coffee. New plants need a number of years until they can produce a reasonable harvest. In addition, the coffee is also handled in certain ways in order to be certified as organic coffee.

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