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Hernández Castillo, R. Aída (2016), *Multiple InJustices: Indigenous Women, Law, and Political Struggle in Latin America*

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HERNÁNDEZ CASTILLO, R. AÍDA (2016), *MULTIPLE INJUSTICES: INDIGENOUS WOMEN, LAW, AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN LATIN AMERICA*. TUCSON: THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA PRESS, 330 PP.

Multiple InJustices draws on research conducted with indigenous women in the past 25 years especially in Mexico, but also in Guatemala and Colombia. The struggles of indigenous women facing multiple forms of violence and injustice, particularly State violence, are analyzed from a decolonial feminist perspective on women's rights within the contexts of legal pluralism, neoliberal multiculturalism, and criminalization of poverty and social movements. Both the methodology and the theoretical approach adopted by Hernández Castillo serve as an inspiration for activist scholarship in Latin America and elsewhere.

In this book, composed of five chapters, Hernández Castillo intends to analyze both the power of law and discourses on rights as forms of governmentality that construct certain types of indigenous identity which fit the requirements for neoliberal citizenship, on one hand, and the counterhegemonic responses to these discourses by organized indigenous women, on the other hand. The first chapter focuses on her methodology of “activist research on justice and indigenous women’s rights”. Her ethnographic research methods have changed over time, including legal advice to indigenous women in situations of domestic violence, anthropological expertise on cases of sexual violence committed by military officers, and organizing writing workshops with indigenous women who have been incarcerated.

What impressed me the most in her methodology and theoretical analysis is the way in which Hernández Castillo makes multiple links between different systems of oppression and injustice, different languages and practices of rights and dignity, and different types of activist research. First, she connects her own trajectory of research with the struggles she analyzes throughout the book. For example, while recounting the political genealogies of indigenous women’s organizing, she positions herself in the narrative, inserting her own trajectory of legal and feminist activism and anthropological research. As an urban, *mestiza*, Mexican feminist, educated at Stanford University, she shows how her encounters and dialogues with indigenous women challenged and shaped her research methods and her involvement with their struggles. In the 1990s, she worked in Chiapas with a collective to fight domestic violence against women, including indigenous women. This led her to participate as an “ally” in indigenous

women's movements. From there, she met indigenous women from other countries, especially refugees from Guatemala. In 2010, she had the opportunity to serve as an expert in the case of Inés Fernández Ortega and Valentina Rosendo Cantú, who were victims of rape committed by military officers in Guerrero, Mexico. This allowed her to learn from indigenous women's struggles for justice at international institutions, such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Most recently, she worked in a writing workshop project with indigenous women inmates in Mexico.

Secondly, Hernández Castillo brings together the results of her activist research projects and the genealogies of different indigenous women's groups *across time and space*. There is a common thread linking the struggles of the indigenous women addressed throughout the book. At the same time, the author is careful in not homogenizing and essentializing the identities and cultural and legal practices of indigenous women. Chapter 2, for example, addresses the genealogy of political indigenous struggles in which indigenous women have been key participants. Using the metaphor of "dialogues", Hernández Castillo shows that indigenous women have been constructing their own organizations and political identities in dialogue with diverse social actors and in the context of social hierarchies and semantic tensions.

The new political identities of indigenous women should not be homogenized and should not be diluted within either the political identities of indigenous people or the gender identities of the feminist movements. They have either appropriated or rejected the discourses on human rights and women's rights in different ways. Going beyond intersectionality, Hernández Castillo takes a historical and non-essentializing cultural-political approach to indigenous women's struggles. Chapter 3, for example, addresses the possibilities and limitations of communitarian indigenous law for indigenous women, showing how the vernacularization of women's rights has helped indigenous women to participate in the spaces of communal justice while influencing what is understood by indigenous law. Yet, a feminist identity is appropriated by a minority of indigenous women's groups. "Gender" is also reconceptualized by indigenous women's organizations according to a vision of complementarity, rather than oppositional forms of femininity and masculinity. Moreover, cultural and material needs are inseparable from identity politics. Individual experiences of oppression and violence are also framed by indigenous women and their organizations as a collective, historical and structural form of violence.

The analysis of the cases of Inés Fernández Ortega and Valentina Rosendo Cantú, discussed in Chapter 4, is illuminating. These cases show not only the impact of strategic litigation on the subjectivities of the actors involved. Rape in these cases is framed as a form of violence related to historical and structural violence committed by the State. The

new frame created from below, from the knowledge and practices of the indigenous women, shapes the discourse of the human rights defenders and of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and has an impact on the remedies determined by the Court.

Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on the transformation of the “multicultural state” to the “penal state”, illustrated by the incarceration of indigenous women and the criminalization of poverty and social movements in Mexico. The “neoliberal multicultural” agenda of the 1990s and 2000s did not imply structural reforms allowing redistribution of power and resources. The States also relied on a punitive model of security. But in the specific case of Mexico, Hernández Castillo notices that the administrations of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) and Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) have been characterized by a shift from a discourse that incorporated indigenous peoples as part of the “national cultural heritage” that promoted multiculturalism, to a new discourse that represents indigenous people as “poor” or “destabilizers of the social peace”, criminalizing their social movements (p. 190). This last chapter of the book explores how “the penal system has become a means for domestication, for strengthening structural racism, and for frequently legitimizing slave labor for the globalized neoliberal economy” (p. 191). Drawing on her experience of activist research in two correctional institutions in Mexico, she also reflects on the creation of new counterhegemonic discourses by incarcerated indigenous and mestizo women members of one editorial collective of women in prison. Thus, whereas the previous chapters focus on political and legal mobilization, the book ends with notes on the use of writing as a tool for reconstructing women’s identities and denouncing penal violence.

Given the reactionary politics against human rights that is spreading and dominating the political landscape in the Americas, writing and storytelling are some of the few alternatives for resisting State violence. But the use of human rights law and human rights institutions should not be abandoned. After all, as Hernández Castillo concludes, “the hegemony of the state is always an unfinished process. The political agendas of neoliberal multiculturalism and of penal states have not been entirely successful” (p. 230). At the same time, she warns us that,

In the search for other ways of imagining the world and thinking of other possible futures, the temptation to idealize indigenous cultures has been present. [...] This book has been an effort to confront these ahistorical views to demonstrate the cultural creativity of indigenous women in the realms of justice and law. (p. 233)

Hernández Castillo’s research projects analyzed in this book and her call for an activist approach to struggles for rights and justice, situated in time and space, should

serve as an example for all scholars and activists from, or interested in learning about, the Americas.

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