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López-Calvo, Ignacio

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Author(s): Ignacio López-Calvo

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CHICANISMO MEETS ZAPATISMO: U.S. THIRD WORLD FEMINISM AND TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM IN GRACIELA LIMÓN'S *ERASED FACES*

Ignacio López-Calvo
California State University, Los Angeles

Hermanas yo también quiero invitar a las mujeres a hacer un llamado que se organicen para que juntas nosotras podemos para defender nuestro derecho y también nosotros tengamos igualdad. Hermanas ya no permitamos que nos sigan engañando el gobierno y el presidente de la República porque hay muchas cosas que está viniendo sobre nosotras como mujeres que somos. "Palabras dirigidas a las mujeres" (Desde las montañas del sureste mexicano el EZLN Comandanta Fidelity [January 1, 2003])

Que nosotras vamos a obligar obligatoriamente nuestro respeto como mujeres que somos aun pongan su carita triste. Porque todavía hay muchas partes de México que nosotras las mujeres somos maltratadas, despreciadas, explotadas y dicen que no servimos, que no valemos, que no tenemos ningún derecho, pero hoy este momento se ha cumplido, que lo vamos a hacer: que por obligación nos tienen que respetar. Palabras de la Comandancia Zapatista en Oventik, Chiapas (Comandanta Fidelity [August 9, 2003])

Chicana theorist Chela Sandoval, in her essay "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and The Method of Oppositional Consciousness in The Postmodern World," proposes to break ties to ideology when necessary in order to establish an alliance with other decolonizing movements—of men and women—committed to emancipation and equality: "It is a location wherein the praxis of U.S. third world feminism links with the aims of white feminism, studies of race, ethnicity, and marginality, and with postmodern theories of culture as they crosscut and join together in new relationships through a shared comprehension of an emerging theory and method of oppositional consciousness" (17). Sandoval labels this shift in paradigm toward a differential/oppositional activity and consciousness "U.S. Third World Feminism." Flexibility and mobility are two key words in this new tactical subjectivity that denies any one ideology as the final

answer. More specifically, U.S. third world feminists identify the benefits of establishing alliances with other women of color across the races, cultures and classes, the “new mestizas, ‘Woman Warriors’ who live and are gendered ‘between and among’ the lines, ‘Sister Outsiders’ who inhabit a new psychic terrain which Anzaldúa calls ‘the Borderlands,’ ‘la nueva Frontera’” (Sandoval 5). From this perspective, in this essay I shall underline the way in which Chicana author Graciela Limón,¹ in her novel *Erased Faces* (2001; recipient of Boston’s Gustavus Myers Outstanding Book Award), establishes a dialogue between Chicanismo and Zapatismo, with the object of presenting Zapatista women fighters as a model of behavior for Chicanas. This text exemplifies the lasting and increasing influence of Zapatismo on Chicana/o cultural production and leadership. Among the many potential aspects of this impact, Limón’s novel mainly exposes two: first, the evolution from a male-dominated to a feminist and egalitarian form of leadership; and secondly, the transition from nationalistic to transnational and pluralist views.

Coinciding with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on 1 January 1994, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) began an uprising in the Southern Mexican State of Chiapas that would change the image of revolution and revolutionaries in Latin America:

Subcomandante Marcos and his ski-masked indigenous followers took over San Cristóbal de las Casas and issued their “Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle,” a manifesto declaring opposition to the Mexican state, its land policies, and NAFTA.² The rebel action was timed to coincide with the enactment of NAFTA and attract the attention of the international press to the plight of the Maya peoples of Chiapas, a place where cattle ranchers and coffee producers have traditionally pushed Indian peasants off their lands. (Raaf 201)

Soon this local movement had global repercussions and became a prototype for other groups seeking social justice and autonomy throughout the world. North of the border this historic event would have a lasting influence on the Chicano community, as can be seen both in its cultural production³ and in its activists’ strategies.⁴

¹Graciela Limón was born in Los Angeles and currently lives in San Bernardino, California. She is professor emerita of Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, where she serves as a professor of U.S. Latina/o Literature and chair of the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies. She is also the author of the following novels: *In Search of Bernabé* (1993; translated into Spanish in 1997 as *En busca de Bernabé*; named a *New York Times* Notable Book of the year for 1993 and received a 1994 American Book Award), *The Memories of Ana Calderón* (1994), *Song of the Hummingbird* (1996), and *The Day of the Moon* (1999).

²The Zapatistas’ assumptions seem to have been prophetic: in a *New York Times* article entitled “Reports Finds Few Benefits for Mexico in Nafta” (19 November, 2003) Celia W. Dugger quotes a study by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, which concludes that “the pact failed to generate substantial job growth in Mexico, hurt hundreds of thousands of subsistence farmers there” (1).

³Chicano graphic artists such as José Ramírez, from El Sereno, Los Angeles, and numerous Chicano music groups, including Quetzal, Rage against the Machine, Ozomatli, Revelations, and Aztlan Underground, have been inspired by Zapatismo.

In recent years Chicana/o activists and artists from the Los Angeles area have participated in several encounters with Zapatista rebels.⁵ Although the Zapatistas have expressed their enthusiasm to share and learn from the Chicana/o cultural workers, when the latter first offered their "support," they were met—as Flores explains—with an unexpected answer:

When people from different parts of the world visit with the Zapatista, they (from a very Western perspective) frequently ask (at worst from a point of view of pity and superiority), what can we do to help you? How can we support you? The Zapatista answer is commonly, you can help by helping yourself, by struggling from your own foxhole: "We hear there are serious problems with your youth, gang warfare, drugs, with discrimination of minorities, particularly Indians and blacks, is that true? Is that true?" They are saying that we're going to walk together on this one. (McLaren 9)

Within the context of the aforementioned cultural production, the publication of Graciela Limón's *Erased Faces* can be considered, in many ways, a landmark in the literary representation of the increasing impact of Zapatismo on the Chicana/o movement. This novel narrates Adriana Mora's journey (both in the literal sense and as a self-discovery endeavor) to the Lacandón Jungle, in the Mexican State of Chiapas, a life-changing experience that takes place in 1993, that is, one year before the Zapatista uprising. The romance between Adriana, a Chicana from East Los Angeles, California, and Juana Galvan, a small Tzeltal woman (both fictional characters), symbolizes the implicit author's goal of internationalizing the predicament of the Chicano community. The use of English, Spanish and indigenous languages in the novel is part of the same strategy (in the same vein, in a previous novel, *In Search of Bernabé* [1993], Graciela Limón describes, again from a feminist perspective, the ordeal of Salvadoran immigrant women; see Rodríguez). In Chiapas, besides falling in love with Juana Galvan (Limón explains that she had initially planned to make Orlando and Juana lovers, but the characters themselves decided their destiny [Zapatistas]), Adriana Mora, the protagonist, learns about the oppression suffered by the

⁴In the acknowledgments of *Erased Faces* Graciela Limón thanks her colleague Roberto Flores. Flores, a Chicano activist from Los Angeles who has conducted research on the role of women leaders (particularly senior women) in creating and sustaining the Zapatista movement, is now attempting to import the Zapatista autonomous community as a micromodel and method of struggle that may be useful in the structural rebuilding of his own community in Los Angeles. He proposes to follow the Zapatista structure of participatory democracy and inter-subjectivity ("A process of sharing and learning across cultures in which no one culture dominates" [McLaren 12]) in the development of a long-term strategy for social justice and self-determination. This infra-structural development should bring about—according to Flores—the organized participation of the vast majority of civil society, that is, "non-government, non-corporate, non-military force" (McLaren 4): "Because of vast and growing similarities between the socio-economic situation of indigenous people in Mexico and the Chicano Mexicano Latino pluriethnic communities within the U.S. (Latinos are now the poorest of the poor), I believe that the Zapatista Autonomy process has invaluable revolutionary resources and should be looked at as a possible model for structural empowerment. I am here proposing that a thorough study of the Autonomy model as it is being carried out in Chiapas be made to enrich and enhance the efforts for democracy and justice in the U.S. Autonomy" (Autonomy 3).

⁵Most Zapatistas belong to eleven ethnic groups, including Tojolabales (the core Zapatista indigenous group), Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Choles, Lacandones, Kachiqueles, Mams, and others.

local natives since the times of the Spanish Conquest, identifies with their suffering, and ends up joining the Zapatistas. Although Juana's subsequent assassination eliminates the possibility of a long-term relationship between the two women, the foundations for a fruitful dialogue between the Zapatista movement and the Chicano community have been symbolically laid through feminist dialogues. Therefore, by expanding her outlook from the traditional nationalist⁶ position to an internationalist and pluralist view of the conflict, Limón puts Chicanismo in perspective with other social justice movements. In this context, Néstor García Canclini maintains:

to overestimate one's own culture—as nationalistic, ethnic, and class movements involved in liberation struggles do—does not always constitute prejudice or a mistake to be regretted; it is in several cases a necessary stage of rejection of the dominant culture and an affirmation of their own. The irrational elements that are part of these processes, the chauvinistic temptation, can be controlled in two ways: through self-criticism from within their own culture and through solidaristic interaction with other subordinate groups or nations. (9)

While in Chiapas the characters experience the ancestral ethnic antagonism between indigenous people and *mestizos* or whites, Adriana is also a victim of racism in Los Angeles: she is not fully accepted in the barrio because of her father's African descent. Along with issues dealing with race, justice, and socio-political struggle, several chapters focus on the sphere of gender and sexuality, thus reflecting new approaches in the Chicana/o movement. Domestic violence, such as the one suffered by Juana Galvan, is also central to the plot of *Erased Faces*, a novel in which indigenous women are suppressed by constant pregnancies and battery by their husbands. These men, who are themselves disheartened by debt and drunkenness, displace their aggression from their employers to their wives. Consequently, in contrast to other texts by or about the Mayans like *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (*I, Rigoberta Menchú*; 1983), where marriage is not criticized, here this institution is depicted as a tool for the subjugation of women: "Our girls are sold for a few pesos without having the right to say if they desire to be married or if they want children" (38). As mentioned earlier, gender and the theme of oppression in general are further developed with the description of a lesbian love affair between the protagonist and Juana Galvan that contests normative heterosexuality. Therefore, Limón claims pluralism for the Chicano movement not only through the recognition of diverse ethnic or cultural identities, but also through the literary representation of diverse sexual identities.

The author resorts to a contrapuntal technique to intertwine the account of this "forbidden relationship" (which, perhaps struggling with issues of verisimilitude, seems to be somewhat tolerated by every one in the Zapatista community) with the narration of the struggle for freedom and survival of Orlando Flores, the indigenous male protagonist whose real name is Quintín Osuna. Ultimately, Orlando's affliction comes to represent that of all indigenous peoples in the Americas. Therefore, the Zapatista uprising draws three decolonial voices—Adriana, the mulatto Chicana from Los Angeles, and two indigenous characters, Juana and Orlando—together. Set against the historical background of the Spanish conquest of the Americas, fictional characters

⁶A stance that, according to Roberto Flores, is understandable as a reaction to being marginalized, but which can become a weakness (Zapatista). Likewise, Anna Sampaio states: "Traditional formations of Chicana/o and Latina/o subjectivity inscribed in the context of a nation-state analysis have become increasingly obsolete with the changes to their daily lives introduced by globalization and increasingly supplanted by the emergence of binational and transnational communities" (50).

interact both with real-life people such as Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos and Comandante Insurgente Ramona, and with historical ones such as Cuauhtémoc, Hernán Cortés, Motolinía, Bartolomé de las Casas, and others.

From the very first page in the novel, where we read about Adriana's nightmare, the Mexican army and the Spanish conquistadors are allegorically blended into one. This narrative device can be understood as a process of "othering" the colonizer. Ranajit Guha has explained this mimicking process of nationalist counter-appropriation:

The appropriated past came to serve as the sign of the Other not only for the colonizers, but ironically for the colonized as well. The latter, in their turn, reconstructed their past for purposes opposed to those of their rulers and made it the ground for marking out their differences in cultural and political terms. History became thus a game for two to play as the alien colonist project of appropriation was matched by an indigenous nationalist project of counter appropriation. (212)

The mystical Lacandón character Chan K'in also provides an indirect explanation for this narrative technique: "The people of this forest know that each one of us has lived not only once, but in other times. What is happening to us now is a repetition of what happened to us then" (21). Hence, perhaps in line with the Chicano movement's fetishization of the Aztec heritage, Adriana Mora learns that she is actually the reincarnation of the heroic Mexica woman Hutizitzilin (the pre-Columbian world also has a central role in her previous novel *Song of the Hummingbird* [1996]). These episodes emphasize the cyclical nature of history: the situation of the Mayas of Chiapas today is very similar to their circumstances five centuries earlier. Today's plight, therefore, is a continuation of the same one that Fray Bartolomé de las Casas denounced in the Spanish court. Likewise, despite the fact that they oppose violence, the Catholic Church in the novel, close to the tentes of Liberation Theology, represented by the bishop, continues to have a sympathetic stance toward the indigenous people and to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional; EZLN) in this case.

Although during her first days in the Lacandón Jungle Adriana Mora noticed that the indigenous people were very reserved with her and other outsiders, she ends up earning their confidence. A well-intentioned Adriana has arrived in Chiapas with the subconsciously patronizing goal of assisting or supporting the indigenous uprising by recording the daily lives of the Lacandón women, thus providing them with a voice. Despite her charity-oriented mentality, however, in the end the young free-lance photojournalist is the one that ends up benefiting the most from the intercultural exchange. Underneath the mask of a self-assured and independent professional (she is about twenty-two to twenty-four years old, according to Limón [*Zapatistas*]), Adriana Mora is also attempting—once again subconsciously—to heal her own personal wounds, which came as a result of her mother's assassination of her father and her subsequent suicide. This traumatic event led her to a harsh life in various foster families. She is haunted by constant nightmares that evoke her parents' death and lives under a cloud of overwhelming feelings of rejection and loneliness. Once she joins the revolution, however, her love for Juana (who, after surviving and escaping an abusive marriage, has now become a Zapatista leader) becomes a giant step in the healing process. In addition, the Zapatistas assign her the task of chronicling the struggle on film, which also contributes to her gaining a sense of purpose in life and finding the inner peace and harmony lost after her childhood trauma. In the process, Adriana is pleasantly surprised to find out that Chiapaneco women are not only active participants in the "guerra contra el olvido", but they have also taken leadership roles. The political scientist Kathleen Bruhn has explained that, in fact, the leading role of women was not part of the original plans of the EZLN,

but “it got there through the back door” (Zapatistas). When recruiters went to the villages, men were away working as day laborers; therefore, the only ones that could be addressed were their wives. Once recruited, these women began to demand their right to speak and be respected, their right to study, to be drivers, etc. Women’s position in the EZLN evolved from necessity and became a sort of revolution in the indigenous community (Zapatistas). Returning to the plot of *Erased Faces*, during the ten days of military confrontation (January 1-10, 1994), the characters of these indigenous women are the vanguard of the rebel troops, leading them to a victory against an army of humiliated soldiers led by the wicked and male chauvinist Palomón Cisneros. With Adriana’s return to the United States in 1998, after her four-year stay in Chiapas, the reader is implicitly invited to envision the way in which she will import and implement in her own community the Zapatistas’ utopian dreams, participatory democratic structures and leadership organization, just as Roberto Flores (Limón’s friend and colleague) is doing in real life.

As to the other female protagonist, Juana Galvan, she also felt betrayed and abandoned when her father, in exchange for a mule, sold her to Cruz Ochoa, an abusive and older Lacandón man who was looking for a wife and whom she had never met before. Graciela Limón explains that this detail in the novel is based on true facts: “As we speak, right now—this is not last century—right now, young girls of twelve and thirteen are being bartered off for a handful of pesos, a mule, a donkey, whatever. And this, of course, is a huge injustice to any human being. And this is one of the reasons why in that huge rebellion the women have a big invested voice in saying ‘Look, we’re human beings’” (Expanding 2). Disappointed, Juana Galvan ends up breaking with her people’s traditions. She leaves her husband to join Orlando Flores, another Lacandón man who is recruiting volunteers for the uprising. Later in the plot, Juana confronts her unrepentant father, who is incapable of acknowledging his profound machismo. Ultimately, the brave decision of joining the Zapatistas becomes an empowering experience not only for Juana, but also for the other women who follow in her footsteps, and who have come to represent half of the insurgent force: “She frequently thought of the many village women she had met during the past months, of their reticence and passivity, and she wondered how it was that women of the force had transformed themselves” (218).

The representation of ethnic and class conflicts in the novel appears with the vicissitudes of the third protagonist, Orlando Flores. Along with a brief appearance by Marcos, he is a refreshing exception amid numerous depraved male characters: El Brujo, Cruz Ochoa, Palomón Cisneros, Absolón and Rufino Mayorga, etc. After working since he was fourteen in the ranch *Las Estrellas* as a houseboy for the landowner Don Absolón Mayorga, Quintín Osuna (who would change his name to Orlando Flores once he felt free) loses his relatively privileged position of favor once his boss finds out that he has dared to cross class and ethnic boundaries by befriending his son Rufino. In Don Absolón’s words: “*En esta vida, siempre hay que guardar nuestro lugar*” (117). Rufino’s first reaction is to defend his best friend, but he will abandon his requests after his father is able to entice him with allowing him to pursue his dream of becoming an army officer. Once Don Absolón tells his son that he has been accepted to a military academy in Mexico City, the latter forgets about Quintín and initiates his downfall as a character. He ends up participating in the massacre of Tlatelolco in 1968 as a member of the military who fired on the civilians, but after that violent night he decides to return to *Las Estrellas* to follow in his villainous father’s footsteps. Indeed, Rufino’s main role as a character is to demonstrate the way in which a particular type of society, corrupted by centuries of racial inequalities, can easily turn an innocent boy into a merciless oppressor. Don Absolón punishes Quintín Osuna by sending him to work as a *boyero*, a torturous ordeal in which workers have to cut mahogany trees and pull the trunks

through the muddy jungle. Desperate, one day Quintín Osuna (Orlando Flores) beheads *El Brujo*, the overseer, and manages to escape by joining the *tzak' bail* or armed movement against *los patrones* (Limón strategically inserts indigenous and Spanish terms [*kap jol* = the anger of the people, *tatic* = Little Father, *yuca*, *petate*, *patrón*] in her narration not only because some of them cannot be easily translated into English, but also with the object of providing the text with an air of authenticity).

As we have seen, instead of a conscious commitment to the struggle, in the case of all three main characters, Adriana, Juana and Orlando (Quintín Osuna), inner conflicts and identity crises, are the ultimate cause of their involvement in the emancipating political struggle. Kathleen Bruhn points out that this is one of the successes of the novel: while Marcos, as the spokesman of the Zapatistas, presents the struggle to the world as a movement against Neoliberalism (or Globalization) and NAFTA, Graciela Limón brings these relations of dependence and exploitation to a regional level and allows the characters to express their own internal motivations (Zapatistas). In fact, this approach reflects the fact that social movements are made up of individuals with diverse motivations.

The faces that had been effaced by oppression are now being erased by choice with the same kind of ski mask that Mayor Insurgente Maribel wears in the cover of the Arte Público Press edition. Once again, the philosophical elder Chan K'in provides a background to the explanation of the mysterious title of the novel: "We used to be like stones, like plants along the road. We had no word, no face, no name, no tomorrow. We did not exist. But now we have vision" (41). This character interprets Adriana's dreams and represents the profound spirituality of his people, despite centuries of oppression. Later, Orlando Flores extends the explanation of the title: "masking our faces in order to give a face to our people" (94). According to Roberto Flores, the Zapatistas use these masks with the dual purpose of anonymity to defend themselves from the thousands of governmental troops that surround them, but also to symbolize that they "are all the same" (Zapatista). Graciela Limón herself has explained that the mask that the Zapatistas wear symbolizes the fact that they renounce to their individual identity "in the desire to bring identity to one people" (Zapatistas).

Along with the oppressive landowners, some indigenous men are also tarnished in the novel for becoming sub-oppressors (to use Paulo Freire's term) once they join the army. Thus, Adriana "wondered why he [an indigenous man] allowed himself to be instrumental to the misery of his own people" (228). Likewise, there are passages that denote a deliberately soft criticism of some of the Zapatistas' motivations. In one of these passages the omniscient narrator clarifies that Orlando Flores is moved by his thirst for personal revenge: "Memories of Don Absolón, of his son Rufino, of El Brujo, and even of his friend Aquiles, filled him with an insatiable desire for vengeance, making him forget his commitment to justice, to freedom—all the ideals that had led him to join the insurgents" (183-84). In this sense, Paulo Freire condemns the idea of a "private revolution" in which the masses seek revenge and power, forgetting the true revolutionary spirit: "they may participate in that process with a spirit more revanchist than revolutionary" (122). Indeed, Orlando ultimately experiences moral growth and regrets having drowned his former friend Rufino Mayorga in mud, in a vendetta for the assassination of his parents. He realizes that, after all, his parents' death has not been vindicated and that his vengeance has lowered him to the level of his former master.

The title of chapter eleven, "Why don't you come and see?," works as an indirect invitation to the reader to learn from the strategies used by the EZLN. In this chapter, Adriana Mora arrives at the Zapatista camp in the mountains and immediately notices that women are allowed to be

active participants in the insurgents' meetings. Equally surprising to her is the dialogical interaction between the *comandancia* and the rebel soldiers. Decisions are made through broad consultation and consensus, without stifling discussion. Thus, when Orlando announces the next step in the struggle, various men openly express their opinions: "These words unleashed a torrent of remarks and questions that pelted Orlando from different directions. Juana had never witnessed such outspoken men. Her experience had taught her that silence was usually her people's response. She saw, however, that Orlando answered every inquiry and comment looking each speaker in the eye" (90).

Yet, the ideologeme of the revolutionary is not always portrayed in a Manichaean way as a flawless and angelical being, as we see in the scene in which one of the Zapatista rebels confronts Orlando's decision to recruit women: "Women? That's crazy! ¡Estás loco! Women are useless in war! In fact, why are women here? War is not for women! This is none of their business!" (90). Unexpectedly, the enraged reaction of the Zapatista women—no longer *soldaderas* but *comandantas*—silences and embarrasses the male-chauvinist insurgent by presenting a counter-narrative that reminds him of the oppression that they have had to suffer for centuries: "We have endured not only the fist of *el patrón* but that of our fathers, our brothers, our husbands. We have earned the right to be in the war!" (91). This scene shows the results of the process of *concientización* (or awareness-raising, again in Freire's terms) initiated in the Lacandón Jungle. These indigenous women incarnate Chela Sandoval's 'Woman Warriors' in the most literal sense. The following chapter in the novel opens with a dialog between Juana and Orlando, in which the latter praises women's strength, laments the simultaneity of oppressions (women, indigenous, poor) they have had to endure, and states that, without them, the Zapatistas will not prevail.

In light of these passages, it is clear that the ideas of unity-in-diversity and feminism-in-nationalism are crucial in *Erased Faces*. At the same time, by locating the adventures of the Chicana protagonist in the Lacandón Jungle, the novel is implicitly encouraging the adoption of the Zapatista third-space feminism by the Chicana/o movement. Graciela Limón's "decolonial imaginary" challenges fixed boundaries by including gender and sexual orientation as important critical categories and sources of signification, along with class, race, and culture. In this context, in the last chapter, entitled "She asked me to be the lips through which their silenced voices will speak," Adriana lends her voice—in the fashion of the mediated narratives of *testimonios*—to the subaltern women of Chiapas and, in particular, to her deceased lover, Juana, who was the victim of a hate crime. This can be observed in the following passage, which is presented in the form of an interior monologue in which, during her flight from Merida, Mexico, to Los Angeles, a completely transformed Adriana shows her awakening to a new consciousness and political commitment:

Juana's murder was caused by hatred, but it was even more than loathing because dangling from it, like poisonous snakes, was the repugnance and disgust for women like us. Her love for me was discovered; word had got around and Palomón Cisneros' evil snout had picked up the scent of those rumors. She was erased because she had been strong, because she had been a leader, because she was *una india*, but most of all because she had committed the forbidden act: She had been in love with another woman. (253-4)

In a foreshadowing scene in chapter twelve, Don Absolón Mayorga strikes his younger sister, tears off her clothes, has her whipped in public until she faints, and later casts her into the jungle for being a lesbian. Orlando Flores explains the reasons for that opprobrium to a frightened Juana, who at that point in the plot had never imagined that a woman could have those feelings

for another woman: "Don Absolón's sister was discovered to have been in love with another woman. She was a *manflora*, a woman who loved one of her own kind. I remember he shouted for everyone to hear that what she did, what she was, and what she called love was a sin, that it was repugnant, that she was an animal with no reason to live" (100).⁷ After Orlando's explanation, we see in Juana's thoughts the way in which different types of oppression across class, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation become entangled:

I also see that to the men who want to be our masters, being *una india* or *un indio*, being poor and forced to scratch a life out of a piece of dry dirt, being a *manflora* or a man who loves men, being anyone contrary, is all the same. In their eyes, we share a common destiny in which we are hated, persecuted, tortured and condemned because we threaten their way of life. (100-01)

Gayatri C. Spivak maintains that "if in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (28). Yet, in *Erased Faces* the Zapatista indigenous women, the same "othered" women who had always been virtually invisible to traditional historiography, contest their subaltern condition by using the revolution to their advantage and by exposing the male chauvinism of some male revolutionaries. They put the Zapatista revolution to the test by addressing gender issues and by introducing women's sexuality in their discourse, thus creating a third-space of separation that Emma Pérez has coined "sameness-in-difference." Behind the testimonial characteristics of the novel and its neo-indigenist approach, this particular construction of a Zapatista feminism-in-nationalism is implicitly presented by Graciela Limón as a prototype of social struggle that should be imitated by the Chicana/o movement. In the Zapatista movement that appears in this text most men and women advocate women's rights and the equality of the sexes. Likewise, they are either indifferent or tolerant of lesbian relationships such as Juana's. This recognition of sexual diversity in a racialized group like the indigenous Zapatistas of southern Mexico is celebrated in *Erased Faces* as a prototype for another racialized (and diasporic) group in the United States, the Chicano community, despite the obvious differences in their circumstances.

The social changes caused by the armed struggle have facilitated the access for these indigenous women to an agency that they lacked for centuries. Now they have the capacity to initiate action and resistance freely and autonomously. Their oppositional consciousness disrupts the way in which their identity had always been constructed as being passive and abnegated. Instead, they wisely challenge power relations and protect women's rights by positioning themselves in the interstices of the uprising, moving in and out of their male peers' discourse as needed. Graciela Limón is aware of the fact that, despite obvious differences, the social construction of race in the southern states of Mexico has important connections with that of Chicanas/os in the United States: in both cases indigenosity has been the basis of their disenfranchisement and subalternity. In this regard, she expands the border imaginary by proposing the resistance of these "othered" and ethnicized women from Chiapas—who possess the epistemic privilege of having suffered a centuries-old multiplicity of oppressions across race, class, gender, and sexuality—as a model for Chicanas, another group of Mexican origin. In a similar vein, Anna Sampaio proposes "the linking of oppositional discourse to the struggles that have long been waged outside our own borders" (64). In fact, she has studied the connections between both ethnic groups:

⁷This scene is reminiscent of a similar one in Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus* (*The House of the Spirits*; 1982), in which Férula, Esteban Trueba's sister, is expelled from the family home once her love and desire for Clara, Esteban's wife, are discovered.

Both populations have comparable socioeconomic and political positions relative to their national populations. That is, on key indicators [...] both have consistently been ranked in the lowest percentile. [Both] are linked to forms of colonialism [...] [Both] have been effectively pushed outside the realm of traditional government institutions and public policy making and positioned largely as second-class citizens. [...] While hundreds of Chicana/os and Latina/os from the United States have gone to Chiapas to witness the rebellion, a better indicator of this affinity has been the adoption of cultural symbols, the creation of 'sister communities' and support organizations in the United States. (49)

By dedicating her novel to the memory of those who perished in the massacre of Acteal in 1997 (mostly children and women were massacred; to date no one has been punished for this crime. Limón speaks from a situated perspective. Likewise, in the epilogue⁸ she presents the *intentio operis* as an expression of support for Zapatismo and an earnest denunciation of the oppression of indigenous people in Southern Mexico. Yet, the novel can also be deconstructed as the proposal of an ideogeme for the Chicano movement: that of the ideal woman militant or revolutionary. Echoing Gloria Anzaldúa's groundbreaking premises in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), *Erased Faces* reclaims gender and sexuality (in addition to class and race/ethnicity/culture) as additional organizing principle in Chicana/o literary and cultural studies. Along the same lines, Limón's re-inscription of gynetics also mirrors Chela Sandoval's endorsement of a new epistemology based on the multiple identities and worlds represented in *Mestiza* consciousness. In this respect, the gynocentric perspective of *Erased Faces* is recreated in a transnational context by dialogically interweaving the worlds of Chicanismo and Zapatismo. Together with this transnational perspective, it is important to note that Adriana Mora, the Chicana protagonist, is a mulatta. Even her surname, Mora, evokes yet another different and remote culture, that of the Moors (*moros* in Spanish), whose presence in the Iberian Peninsula from 711 to 1492 could have had some input in the protagonist's ethnic heritage. This narrative strategy exposes the fact that the traditional representations of both Mexican and Chicana/o cultures as homogenous (or only Spanish and indigenous) are mere cultural and nationalist fabrications. In these times of globalization, Limón chooses a post-nationalist, comparative and interethnic perspective for her contribution to the collective agenda of denouncing patriarchal exclusionary practices and restoring agency for (and by) Chicanas today and in history. Her novel emblemizes the new impetus to move beyond the nation-state approach in the Chicano movement, as well as the re-mapping of the border space and the evolution of the focus of Chicano Studies from the micro to the macro and from the local to the global.

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⁸The Epilogue reads: "The war was not lost by the Zapatista insurgents; rather, their struggle continued past the writing of this book. A newly elected president of Mexico returned to the table to dialogue and negotiate with the Zapatista leadership. There is hope that the fundamental rights of the indigenous people of Chiapas have been recognized and from there will come their ultimate victory" (259).

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