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WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

Faculty Curator Series organized by Maylei Blackwell, Associate Professor of Chicana and Chicano Studies and Gender Studies

THE PAST TWO DECADES HAVE witnessed an dramatic increase in international indigenous rights activism on the global scene. Drawing on prior decades of indigenous rights within the international system, activists worked tirelessly to draft and pass the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in 2007. Because indigenous women leaders have been key in leading the charge for indigenous rights as well as women's rights leading, many are now asking whether we are witnessing the (re)emergence of indigenous feminism at the global level. In conjunction with the observance of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples next fall in New York City (which will include only governmental representatives since it is a meeting of the General Assembly), "Women's Activism and International Indigenous Rights" will ex-

plore the intersection of women's rights and indigenous rights and reflect on women's role globally.

This series will focus specifically on leaders in the Continental Network of Indigenous Women (Enlace de Mujeres Indígenas or ECMI), a regional network of indigenous women activists coming from twenty-six organizations in nineteen countries throughout the Americas. Founded in 1994, its growth reflects the emergence of indigenous mass mobilizations and social movements across Latin America and the Caribbean throughout the 1990s as well as the development of a specific set of gendered demands surrounding indigenous autonomy in the region.

While some tie the internationalization of rights discourse to neoliberalism and global economic restructuring, others have discussed how transnational social movement networks developed

specifically to engage the UN have developed new indigenous solidarities and policy advocacy strategies—as well as trained activists to participate in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Critically, this transnational network not only orients activists toward the international arena but it also provides a critical space for exchange to build indigenous women's political identities and forms of political analysis that they take back to their communities. Through this multi-scaled activism, they localize a wide range of strategies against violence against indigenous women, militarization, ecological destruction (mining and resource extraction), intellectual property rights, racism against indigenous people, and the need for women's human rights within their own communities.



Curated by Maylei Blackwell, Associate Professor, Department of Chicano/a Studies at UCLA, “Women’s Activism and International Indigenous Rights” will explore the intersection of women’s rights and indigenous rights and will reflect on women’s role globally.

Blackwell accompanied indigenous social movements for the past sixteen years developing a research expertise on the intersection of women’s rights and indigenous rights within Mexico and California. More recently she has conducted community-based and

collaborative research documenting cultural continuity and political mobilization with Zapotecs and Mixtecs from both the northern sierra as well as the central valleys of Oaxaca as well as the increasingly Mayan diaspora from Guatemala in Los Angeles. In addition, she is a noted oral historian and author of *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (U of Texas Press, 2011), which was a finalist for the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians Book Prize and named by the Western Historical Association as one of the best

book in western women and gender history. Her research focuses on indigenous women’s organizers in Mexico, Latin American feminist movements, and sexual rights activists, all of whom are involved in cross-border organizing and community formation.

Two of the speakers are Margarita Gutiérrez Romero (*shown above*), who spoke on October 22. A video will be available on YouTube soon. The second speaker is Sonia Henríquez, who will be speaking on November 20 in the from 4 to 6 pm in the YRL conference room.



MARGARITA GUTIERREZ ROMERO

From Chiapas to the UN: Women in the Struggle for Indigenous Rights

“Indigenous peoples are being permanently alienated from our being. We are being stripped, ripped off, and plundered of our values, our spirituality, our spirits, even of our gods,” says Margarita Gutiérrez Romero (*shown second from left above*), an Nahuatl activist who will be speaking at UCLA on October 22. She has been involved in the movement for two decades, a time period that has seen a dramatic increase in indigenous rights activism on the global scene. Indigenous women have been key leaders in these efforts to ensure rights—including wom-

en’s rights—for indigenous peoples during this time. For decades, activists worked tirelessly on behalf of a UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which was passed in 2007.

Blackwell selected her as a speaker for this series because of Gutiérrez Romero’s long history of activism on behalf of indigenous people, which began in community radio and continued as she studied journalism at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Part of the indigenous rights movement that burgeoned in the early 1990s, Gutiérrez was a founding member of the National Plural Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA), which advocated for constitutional reform

to establish a system of regional autonomy, and co-founded Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas de las Américas (ECMI), which includes organizations in twenty-six countries in North, Central, and South America. “The powerful growth of [this organization],” says Blackwell, “reflects the emergence of indigenous mass mobilizations and social movements across Latin America and the Caribbean throughout the 1990s as well as the development of a specific set of gendered demands surrounding indigenous autonomy in the region.”¹

ECMI’s member organizations are committed to training, research, and advocacy in areas including nonviolence and ancestral

justice; territory, environment, climate change and food sovereignty; international law instruments; intellectual property and biodiversity; health and spirituality: sexual and reproductive health; political participation; indigenous intercultural education; and racism and discrimination. In 1995, the group organized the First Continental Meeting of Indigenous Women in Quito, Ecuador. It has gone on to “consolidate [itself] as a network that links indigenous women from throughout the Americas to promote the formation of women’s leadership and influence, from the perspective indigenous spaces of representation and international, regional, national decision and the organizations they lead in order to strengthen policies that allow us to fully exercise our human rights.”²

In 1994, Gutiérrez Romero was as an advisor at the negotiations on Indigenous Rights and Culture, Dialogue and Negotiation in San Andrés, between the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, the Chiapas State government, and the Mexican national government. These negotiations resulted in the San Andrés Accords, which were never implemented due to governmental incalcitrance. A key component of the negotiations regarded “the triple oppression suffered by indigenous women (because they are poor, indigenous and women)” (3) Included

in the demands was this request: “Among the public resources which belong to the indigenous peoples there should be a special consignment for women, administered and managed by them. This will give them the economic capacity so that they can begin their own productive projects, guarantee them potable water and enough food for everyone, and allow them to protect health and improve the quality of housing.”³ Only a portion of these demands was actually included in the Accords, and the Indigenous Law ratified in May of 2001 was a even further watered down version of the original demands.^{4,5} The law only states that officials have a responsibility “to promote the incorporation of indigenous women into development, through the support of productive projects, the protection of women’s health, the creation of incentives to favor women’s education, and their participation in the decision-making related to communal life.”⁶

As the indigenous movement grew after the 1994 Zapatista rebellion, Gutiérrez Romero went on to serve as a member of the National Indigenous Council (CNI) and was National Coordinator of Mexico’s Indigenous Women (CONAMI) and Secretary for Political Education in the Executive Committee of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). From 2001 until 2010,

she was President of the International Instruments Commission for Continental Network of Indigenous Women. She is currently President of the State Coordinator of Indigenous Women Organizations in Vinajel, Chiapas, Mexico. In that capacity, she participated on a panel for the Organization of American States Policy Roundtable on “Inclusion and Democracy in the Americas” in April of 2011. Highlighting the ongoing efforts of activists and organizations to secure equality and full participation in governance for indigenous women is the focus of this series. “These transnational social movement networks that were developed to engage the UN,” according to Blackwell, “have resulted in new indigenous solidarities and policy advocacy strategies. Critically, this transnational network not only orients activists toward the international arena but it provides a critical space for exchange to build indigenous women’s political identities and forms of political analysis that they take back to their communities. Through this multi-scaled activism, they localize a wide range of strategies against violence against indigenous women, militarization, ecological destruction (mining and resource extraction), intellectual property rights, racism against indigenous people, and the need for women’s human rights within their own communities.”



SONIA HENRIQUEZ

Advances and Challenges of the Indigenous Women's Movement in Panama

From the Guna pueblo, Sonia Henríquez is a leader of Olowagali, a women's organization of the Guna Yala region, which is along the Caribbean coast of Panama. Since 1996, Henríquez has served as the president of the National Coordinator of Indigenous Women of Panama/Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas de Panama (CONAMUIP), representing the Guna people. The organization formed in 1993, when the women from three ethnic groups—Guna, Emberá and Ngobe—came together to form an organization of indigenous women. The objec-

tives of the organization are to strengthen the participation and leadership of indigenous women within the regional, national and international sphere, as a manager and player involved in the social, economic, cultural, and political development of society; to strengthen the historical and cultural identity, by recovering the wisdom and spirituality of indigenous women; to raise the economic level of indigenous women and their families; and to improve all aspects of the living conditions of indigenous women.

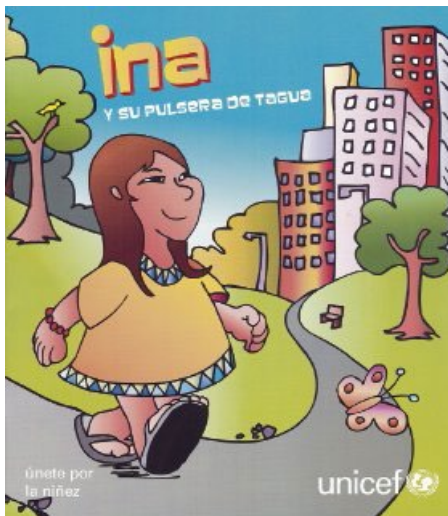
Henríquez also served as Executive Coordinator for the Continental Network of Indigenous Women of America, a network of indigenous women's organizations from North, Central, and South

America that provides a space for indigenous women to exchange experiences and elaborate continental strategies and concerted international action. She is also coordinator for the Continental Commission of Commercialization and Intellectual Property, which addresses issues of native women's art production and its commercialization and cooptation, a crucial issue since a major part of the economy of the Guna Yala region is focused on the production and sale of molas. These colorful, appliquéd textiles have been part of the traditional dress of the women since cotton cloth was introduced after the Spanish colonization.

Henríquez participated in a successful lobbying effort to protect the Guna people against the misappropriation of indigenous craftsmanship, after imitations of molas were being mass-produced and sold. These lobbying efforts resulted in a national law, Law No. 20, the Special System for the Collective Intellectual Property Rights of Indigenous Peoples for the Protection and Defense of their Cultural Identity and their Traditional Knowledge, on June 26, 2000. Following the passage of this law, the group organized the First National Crafts Workshop in 2005 to provide craftsmen and designers with information on intellectual property law and the regulations concerning registration of use, which protects various indigenous craft models.

As an activist for women's and indigenous rights, Henríquez has also conducted national and

regional seminars on gender and development, domestic violence, reproductive and sexual health, leadership, and strengthening community organizations. She has also participated in international workshops and conferences including the Continental Indigenous Women's Workshop (1996), the Indigenous Women's Caucus on the Issues of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (2001), and the Central American Congress on STD/HIV and AIDS.



In 2009, twenty years after the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF published *Ina and Her Tagua Bracelet* in conjunction with the National Coordinator of Indigenous Women of Panama, a storybook based on the story of a Panamanian girl and her experiences moving to the city. At the public event to celebrate its publication, Sonia Henríquez introduced the book and an interactive CD that accompanied it. While it is a story of discrimination, it also stresses the value of friendship and the notion that we may be

different but we have the same rights. The book was distributed free to all schools and libraries, so that children could learn about the culture and traditions of indigenous peoples.

At the publication in 2010 of *Sociolinguistic Atlas of Indigenous Peoples in Latin America*, a linguistic and sociocultural analysis for Latin America, published by UNICEF with CONAMUIP and the Ministry of Social Development and the support of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, Henríquez noted the importance of the volume for the indigenous peoples and those seeking to support them, "It is a tool to learn about the situation of indigenous peoples in Latin America and Panama."

Earlier this year, she participated in a Dialogue on the Rights of Indigenous Women in the Inter-American System in Guatemala City put on by the Organization of American States (OAS). Along with leaders from Mexico and Costa Rica, Henríquez spoke about experiences of indigenous women in relation to the protection mechanisms offered by the inter-American human rights system.

She has been recognized with many awards and scholarships, including a full scholarship to attend an intensive course on Human Rights at the University of Geneva in 2006 and a World Organization of Intellectual Property Medal of Merit from the for her defense in the Protection of Traditional Knowledge of Indigenous Peoples.

Notes

1. "Indigenous Groups Challenge Doctrine of Christian Discovery and Domination," July 22, 2011, Jason Coppola, Truthout, <http://www.truthout.org/news/item/2169:indigenous-groups-challenge-doctrine-of-christian-discovery-and-domination>
2. http://www.csuchico.edu/zapatist/HTML/Archive/Communique/advisors_on_SA_deal.html. These negotiations resulted in the San Andrés Accords, which were never implemented without change because continuing conflict between the parties led to an impasse, "18 years after the signing of the San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture, these continue not to be recognized by the State," SIPAZ, International Service for Peace Blog, <http://sipazen.wordpress.com/2014/03/01/chiapas-18-anos-years-after-the-signing-of-the-san-andres-accords-on-indigenous-rights-and-culture-these-continue-not-to-be-recognized-by-the-state/>
3. "Mexico Ratifies Indian Rights Law Amid States' Opposition Mexico Ratifies Indian Rights Law Amid States' Opposition," Los Angeles Times, July 13, 2001, <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/jul/13/news/mn-21878>
4. "Autonomy and Resistance in Chiapas: Indigenous Women's Rights and the Accords of San Andrés," Petra Purkharthofer, International Social Theory Consortium, Roanoke, May 18-21, 2006
5. <http://ecmia.org/origen>
6. Video of Gutiérrez Romero (in Spanish): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZncHidq9jzU>