*Social-environmental indigenous movements and their influence on institutional policy: the case of the Frente de Mujeres Mazahua en Defensa del Agua, Mexico*.

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This research presents a preliminary analysis of a case study that integrates ecological analysis, social-environmental politics and indigenous and gender issues in Mexico, thus requiring the interconnection of several disciplines both theoretically and methodologically. In 2003, severe floodings caused by the overflowing of a river in the municipality of Villa de Allende in the federal State of Mexico resulted in a total crop loss for the people living in the area, the Mazahuan indigenous community. This was due to the tremendously challenging and often disputed management of one of the two great state-controlled water systems bringing water to the Great Mexico City metropolitan area. Immediately after this event, the Mazahuas engaged in a legal action and civil rights protest to win compensation for their loss. The negotiations quickly progressed to involve a visible, active, empowered indigenous women participation - with a strategic, powerful, symbolic display of traditional colorful dresses, agricultural tools, a peaceful but military-styled organization that also concentrates on the metaphorical role of women as mothers. Dynamically and innovatively unifying pratical and strategic gender interests (Molyneaux 2001: 19) with broader cultural, human and environmental rights, the Frente de Mujeres Mazahua en Defensa del Agua promptly lead to the encompassing of wider social-environmental rights' requests, such as the right to clean water access and to a more general, far-reaching, inclusive sustainable development, health and conservation plan for the area.

The path of the Mazahuan Movement for Water and its ongoing outcomes are a clear example of how unified disputes over social and environmental politics and governance are gaining prominence in Latin America, a sub-continent where present and future global implications for sustainable development are being shaped creatively in spite of and sometimes also thanks to historical disputes and tradition. In fact, as far as the Mazahuan case is concerned, traditional concepts on identity and rights are mixed with innovative concepts on the natural-cultural interface (Döring and Zunino, 2014) and with originally pre-Hispanic and synchretic views on the landscape and human positioning in it. This way of linking nature, cosmology and politics sets an interesting example of how global attitudes towards the environment and human actions can be transformed by the joint struggle of a community that can at the same time retain its own history but also be an active part of the present.

For what specifically concerns the social-environmemtal issues involved, it must be underlined how in the Latin American megacities the massive rural and indigenous migration is creating new cross-dimensional interrelations between the traditionally rural and the new urban identities, as concerns both people and spaces (Canabal Cristiani, 2005: 161). Thus, an integrated social-environmental interface is generated and often the existing demands regarding social, gender and ecological rights are being creatively linked with inventive translocal natural-cultural stances. In these hybrid spaces, social actors are forming intergroup, transterritorial solidarity and land and status maintenance movements. In fact, the inequality and marginalization of the megalopolis-countryside frontier can also contain a constructive landscape of agricultural-herbalist sustainable knowledge and practices, social-economic exchanges and cultural visibility. This dynamic “symbiotic interaction context” (Ávila Sánchez, 2005:20), simultaneously original, urbanized and migrant, is also found in the Valley of Mexico’s great metropolitan area.

It is in this fluid natural-cultural and rural-urban interface that the predominantly Mazahuan communities, and particularly their women, have organized this multi-faceted social-environmental movement linking one of the most fundamental social-environmental rights, drinking water access, to human, women’s and indigenous rights (Gómez Fuentes 2009) and to ecosystem conservation. Contemporarily fighting for justice, reclaiming socially-ecologically sustainable land use and acting as mediators with the state’s institutions to change its social policy, the Frente de Mujeres Mazahua en Defensa del Agua had a first, brief victory in 2004. After taking over the water system that distributes drinkable water to the capital, a ground-breaking agreement was signed between the Secretaría de Gobernación, the National Commission for Water (Conagua) and the Mazahuan community. Nevertheless, the agreement has not been implemented, and the Frente is resourcefully continuing to act, pushing for a genuine change in institutional attitude and policy. Indigenous-farmer women movements are once more (Aranda Bezaury 1997) proving to be one of the main social, political and economic dynamics of influence in Latin American and global social-environmental policy.

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