

# Preface

When I began studying the migration of indigenous women to Mexico City in 1973, the trickle-out of migrants in rural areas was already beginning to reflect the failure of the implementation of ‘trickle-down’ theories of development to bring about balanced economic and social developments in different sectors and regions. Since then, such outflows have become massive in many countries in the world, so much so that migrations, women, indigenous peoples, and the assimilation of migrants in host countries have become international priority issues today. I worked in these research fields from the 1970s to the 1980s, trying to bind them together in a framework of ‘social development’, and by the 1990s it seemed to me that a deeper sense of cultural dislocation was having either a constructive or a destructive effect on the historical fabric of many societies around the world. As my research drew closer to the issues of environmental global change, I then tried to piece together the dichotomies created by scientific models—ecosystems/social systems, natural resources/human resources (population), economic growth/social development—by addressing them within a framework of ‘social sustainability’. This book reflects an anthropologist’s intellectual pathway through these theoretical and thematic concerns and the attempt to bridge the anthropologist’s empirical location with the anthropologist’s macro-scale world perspective. It is also a testimony to how a researcher from a developing country joined so many others in the emergence of social science research in countries in the South.

Movement has always intrigued me. In a sense it has become the central concern of my anthropological research, both in terms of geographical migrations, and of shifts in cultural traditions and intellectual paradigms. Why do people move? Why do people change their inherited way of thinking and feeling? And then, how does the human capacity to create culture and to live in convivial societies have to be transformed to align development to the arrow of time?

As I grew up in a multicultural setting, I was struck by the cleavages and inconsistencies within cultures and religions and by militancies whose claims visibly ran counter to what seemed to be reality. The movement of peoples from different geographies and cultures fascinated me, perhaps because both my parents were migrants coming from different cultures.<sup>1</sup> Also, it happened that my Indian nanny

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<sup>1</sup> My father, born in Monterrey, Mexico, had travelled as regional CEO for an American company to Peru and Argentina before settling in Mexico City. My Swiss mother had lived in Switzerland and Peru before marrying my father and spoke six languages.

used to whisper hair-raising legends, half in Náhuatl (the indigenous language of central Mexico), tugging me towards a world filled with the spirits of water springs and trees, and animals that talked.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to this imaginative richness, I was pained by the brutal discrimination that was inflicted on indigenous peoples. When I found that anthropology would give me the opportunity of entering such worlds, I read ravenously about Meso-American, African, and Oceanic cultures. The London School of Economics, where I received my postgraduate degree, gave me a global outlook and, most importantly, the understanding that all social processes take place in political and economic contexts.

This volume brings together many articles and chapters of books that I wrote in different fields of knowledge but which were woven together by the need to understand, early on, the ‘first principles’ of social life that Imre Lakatos inspiringly taught us to look for, and later on, the ‘patterns of culture,’ as Ruth Benedict would have it, which would explain why people make the choices they make. The policy counterpart of such a research program would be the debates on development, especially sustainable human development, a discussion, and conceptual evolution I was very fortunate to have been invited to participate in.

Since many of these texts are not available at present, I am grateful to Springer for providing me with the opportunity of publishing them together. I have agreed to republish these texts not without hesitation. Can one justify bringing back into the light essays which were written at a particular time, with a particular language, in the context of specific scientific and social debates which have now shifted in their perceptual weight and pre-eminence? Reading them through, however, made me realize that there is, at the same time, a meta-analysis that may be usefully applied to the shifts in ideas and intentions in social science in recent decades. I have been, in fact, surprised to find that many of the research discoveries and analytic lines of inquiry I worked on are still valid and shed light on how different processes and disjunctions have improved human well-being or, in some specific instances, have worsened in terms of the human prospect. These essays, then, open a window into how and why, while everything *seems* to be changing, so much has *not* changed.

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Lourdes Arizpe

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<sup>2</sup> My nanny, Juana Hernández, had fled to Mexico City after she shot (without killing him) her husband’s murderer in her native town of Huejotzingo, Puebla. For many years, she was unable to go back.

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