INTRODUCTION

Mexican and Mexican American Women's Activism in NGOs: Background on the Michoacán and El Paso/Ciudad Juárez Communities

Some time ago a friend told me about an exchange she had witnessed at a women's forum in El Salvador. The meeting brought together women from different socioeconomic, educational, ethnic, and racial backgrounds to discuss a host of women's issues and plans for action. At the meeting the word *feminismo* was used by women active in feminist circles. On the last day of the meeting a woman stood up and asked if someone could clarify for her the word's exact meaning. She asked if it meant "fe-en-mi-mismo," literally "faith in myself." If so, she added, then she believed in it.

My friend's story left a lasting impression on me, because it highlighted Latinas'[1] more general struggle with what *feminism* means and with what kind of feminism we embrace in our activism. In fact, feminist activist researchers in gender and development studies have lamented that "outside of academia, within policy and activist arenas, the utility and relevance of 'gender' has been highly contested"; further, they argue, "'gender' has come to lose its feminist political content," in particular in grassroots circles (Baden and Goetz 1997: 37). I disagree. This book highlights how grassroots women process their situations and inform themselves and each other

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about mobilization strategies. Some do so in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), developing gender consciousness through their activist work, often opting for goals in line with global feminism.[2] Sonia Alvarez (1997: 94) notes that empowering women requires "a flexible, multidimensional feminist strategy—one that organizes gender-conscious political pressure *at the base*, both within and without the state."[3] It is a strategy adopted by NGOs in Michoacán and in the greater metropolitan area of El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and it is a focus of this book. By studying women's NGOs in these communities we do not simply uncover Mexican and Mexican American grassroots contributions to women's activism; we also better understand the goals grassroots women embrace as they fight for women's rights.

Because this book is itself a feminist project, I used a feminist research approach of oral history and conversation. This allowed me to connect as a Dominican American with Mexican and Mexican American women. While aware that I was not Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicana, as a child of Latin American immigrants, I knew I shared a history and cultural heritage that linked me to the women who participated in this study. We spoke the same language, though our intonations were different. Our stories included family struggles to make ends meet while working multiple shifts in low-paying jobs. We grew up in a society where the voices of Latinas/os, whether documented or undocumented, mattered little. And as women, we found it more difficult to have a meaningful voice in families and societies that often consign us to the margins. Once our conversations began, our backgrounds drew us closer. The connections allowed me to foster a trust that opened doors, so that I could ask questions that often an outsider cannot without raising suspicions. In my case, being an insider was important. I felt comfortable talking about feminism and did not worry that someone might get offended or challenge the use of the word. For a great majority of the women in the NGOs I discuss here, the issues we share as Latinas connect us fundamentally and bring us to women's organizations. Therefore, throughout the book I recognize the particular voices and contributions of Mexican and Mexican American activists without essentializing their experiences, recognizing that their particular struggles echo those of other Latina communities. Consequently, I refer to *Latinas* wherever the

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echoes of this term highlight broader implications for Mexican and Mexican American women's activism. Looking at the larger context of how women's NGOs in Michoacán and El Paso / Ciudad Juárez came into existence underscores the importance of and potential in understanding why and how particular social contexts shape women's activism.

Throughout the project I was challenged by grassroots women's activism, as I believe others of my generation have been. As this book will show, grassroots women engage in and seek alliances and coalitions in mainstream feminist spaces where not too long ago they felt and perhaps still feel underrepresented or not represented at all. In this book, grassroots Mexican and Mexican American women activists allow all of us to look at how we can break barriers and work across women's activist communities. However, I am aware that "the appeal to coalitional politics" can undermine feminist politics, as Sally Baden and Anne Marie Goetz (1997: 53) correctly warn. These tensions emerge throughout this book, such as in chapter 4, which examines the limits of women's activism in these structures. Despite these limits and potential pitfalls, we can learn much from women's activism in NGOs, which is breaking new ground, allowing us to envision the benefits of global feminist approaches, particularly in the growth of women's NGOs as part of an evolving "global feminism."

Because of my transnational, U.S.-Mexico focus, 1995 and the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing provided a rich historical moment. The events leading up to the conference allowed me to study a cross section of the women's movements in international, transnational, and local contexts. Women's NGOs in Michoacán participated extensively in preparatory meetings for the Beijing conference; those in El Paso / Ciudad Juárez did less so. Francisca Montoya, an activist who has worked on the U.S.-Mexico border since her college days, described the benefits of networking for and going to Beijing:

> For the women that went to Beijing you had the opportunity to meet women from other countries. You had an opportunity not only to share what you're doing, but the work that you're doing and who you are and what you're about and what you're hoping to accomplish. . . . but at the same time during the process we were able to listen to what other

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> women were doing. It's such a unique opportunity [not only] to come back . . . energized about who you are and what you're doing but . . . to be around other women, to get ideas.

Despite the benefits some saw in the networking and the efforts leading up to the Beijing conference, not all women's activist communities engaged fully in the preparations or in the meeting itself. This book explores why some women's communities participated more extensively than others in the Beijing process. Much of the answer lies in events impacting women's activist communities and in the strategies with which the groups respond to such events. María de Jesús Gringas Aguirre, cofounder of Centro Mujeres Tonantzín in Ciudad Juárez, noted that while her organization was part of the local committee organizing for Beijing, much of the local activism in El Paso / Ciudad Juárez focused on the murders of border women in the Juárez desert. They put their energies into marches highlighting violence against women and more generally showing the border to be an economically and politically exploited community.

These differences in activist strategies can be important to students of social movements who are interested in whether extensive resources or large networks are necessary for successful social activism. As I hope to show, sometimes movement success is not so straightforward. Women's NGO successes and failures cannot be measured by their ability to mobilize resources and networks. In looking at the activism of Mexican and Mexican American women, we see that they mobilize and articulate their needs within specific sociohistorical realities. When we understand how women's NGOs emerged in their social contexts, we see that grassroots women have taken the personal and made it political, which in itself can be a measure of success, given that for some it is the first step toward self-empowerment. In an interview for this book, Dulce Cortez, cofounder of Mujeres por la Democracia (Women for Democracy) in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, stated:

> One of the things important to me in this work is gaining knowledge in order to share it with the other women I represent in this area. I have come to see that for me the most important thing is for our society to take us into account. I work to overcome the fact that we have been socialized to take care of children and husbands. Our group has become

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politically involved to show that we exist and to have our political parties take us into account.

For Cortez and others I interviewed for the book, Mexican and Mexican American women's sphere of influence in public domains compels us to see personal lives as public struggles for justice. Women's NGOs highlight this point in stating their goals, and the theme permeates documents prepared for the Beijing conference.

Therefore the conference and meetings leading up to it help us to understand women's activism and the issues it raises locally and globally. Of particular interest is how local, national, and international political realities either create or limit social movement opportunities. Focusing on the sociopolitical context of different women's activist communities also allows us to understand why one community engages more extensively than others in expansive networks. The comparison in this book of two women's activist communities with similar cultural heritages and colonial realities is perfect for addressing the limits and opportunities in women's NGO activism. But by no means do I suggest in this comparison that Mexican and Mexican American women's identities or histories and political realities are the same. But in many ways Mexican and U.S.-Mexico border communities share a historical and political tapestry framed in U.S.-Mexico socioeconomic relations. Therefore in trying to understand border-crossing activism, whether in Mexico or on the U.S.-Mexico border, I look to build on several notions that the Chicana feminist and cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa (1999: 84) left us before she died in 2004: "Nosotros los Chicanos [We the Chicanos] straddle the borderlands. . . . Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of mind, not one of citizenship, neither animal respects borders." Mexican and Mexican American communities share much, particularly in their religious cultures, woven from indigenous and Spanish colonial legacies. But one of the most pervasive and potent cultural symbols that binds Mexican and Mexican American communities is La Virgen de Guadalupe: "Guadalupe unites people of different races, religions, languages" (ibid.: 52). This is why, notwithstanding Patricia Zavella's (1997: 185–94) note of caution in recognizing the diversity among Mexicans and

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Mexican Americans, Anzaldúa also contributed greatly to our understanding of common grounds. Also, some, like the sociologist Pablo Vila (2000), correctly note tensions among people of Mexican ancestry in how they perceive each other across the U.S.-Mexico political divide. However, these tensions are less evident in border women's NGOs, which are working across many border communities (Staudt 1997; Staudt and Coronado 2002). This book is a testimony to the spaces that women's NGOs create for women to dialogue and work across geographical, class, race, and gender boundaries.

I follow Anzaldúa's recommendation and view Mexican and Mexican American histories as a framework for understanding women's activism and sociopolitics. Hence my focus on the border-crossing metaphor. The women of Michoacán and the women of greater El Paso/Ciudad Juárez, feeling the impact of an increasingly globalized capitalism, have become aware that women's border communities share much in common. Discussing her research for the La Mujer Obrera (the Woman Worker) organization of El Paso, Sharon Navarro (2002: 189–90) noted that "La Mujer Obrera's mobilization of its women members to appeal to U.S. city, state, and federal institutions has been largely grounded in the creative use of elements of Mexican culture and attempts to build transnational cultural bridges across the border." In Mexico and the U.S. Southwest, global capitalism has made such bridges essential.

GLOBAL CAPITALISM AND THE GROWTH OF WOMEN'S NGOS

Saskia Sassen (1998) argues that the infrastructure of capitalism is now strategic, precise, and focused on enabling private corporations and financial, cultural, consumer, and labor markets to operate internationally. Because of the growing need for NGOs to respond to the effects of this globalization, it is important to understand their histories and recent growth in this context. To do so I begin with the observation that NGOs are diverse institutions having two things in common: they are separate from any state or government agency and they engage in social work or community organizing around social issues (Talamante Díaz, Careaga Pérez, and Parada Ampudia 1994: 327). Typically, they are described as social service institutions, doing social good and promoting economic and social development,

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whether they are part of social movements or not. In recent years, NGOs have flourished, "expanding [the] public policy agenda, both confronting and nudging at governments, international development organizations, and the people that staff bureaucracies in those institutions" (Staudt 1997: vii). In answering why NGOs have flourished and their policy agendas have expanded, the political scientist Kathleen Staudt noted, "The Fourth World Conference on Women, under United Nations auspices, is one important reason among many. Actually several UN-affiliated international meetings in the early 1990s established strong connections to women and gender-fair agendas, including those on the environment (1992), human rights (1993), social development (1995) and most importantly, populations and development, held in Cairo (1994). Beijing, however, was a threshold" (vii).

More specific to Latin America and the origins of some NGOs working in the U.S. Southwest are three historically significant events: (1) the 1960s U.S. economic plan for Latin America called the Alliance for Progress, followed more recently by the neoliberal policies of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); (2) the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council, which encouraged religious organizations to work more closely with the poor; and, (3) the church's Latin American Episcopal Conference in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968, which also emphasized working with poor and marginalized groups (Rubén et al. 1991; Staudt 1997; Sassen 1998; Staudt and Coronado 2002).

In the wake of these events, one notes two basic types of NGOs: those that channel resources and administer projects funded and shaped by the strategies of organizations like the U.S. Agency for International Development (U.S. AID), and those that are supported by nongovernmental actors like philanthropic foundations and are more committed to grassroots organizations (Rubén et al. 1991: 60–61). These more "nongovernmental" NGOs, which are more likely to have evolved from protest or resistance groups, are the ones that tend to link themselves to and become part of women's movements. As I will show, women's NGOs can deepen the women's agenda by mobilizing with global economic and political perspectives. How extensively mobilizing occurs is a related and an important question that, I argue, is best understood in the local histories of feminist and other movements.

To date there is no official record of the total number of women's NGOs in

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Mexico or the U.S. Southwest. But research does show that the rise there of NGOs focused on women's issues is a recent phenomenon. From 1986 to 1991 there were eighty-six registered organizations in Mexico that worked specifically "to better women's social conditions" (Martínez 1991). Of these 70 percent were established in Mexico City. Twenty-five percent were founded after 1970, most after the 1980s, with the greatest increase in the 1990s. Alicia Martínez (1991: 9–10) found that, of the women's organizations registered in Mexico, 52 percent were listed as NGOs, 14 percent were associated with universities, 10.5 percent were governmental organizations, and 22 percent were distributed among varying types of private institutions, including churches, with the remaining 1 percent not specified. Mexican organizations focused on gender from 1970 to 1991 emphasized specialized services for women in the areas of health, legislation, and help for victims of sexual and intrafamily violence.

No comparable study of women's NGOs exists for the U.S. Southwest. The research has looked at women's activism on the U.S.-Mexico border, with an emphasis on the link between border human rights issues and women's issues. The human rights focus entails emphasis on cross-border collaborations: "Activists in the human rights arena are constantly struggling to promote their agenda on both sides of the border because human rights issues transcend the border" (Staudt and Coronado 2002: 135). U.S.-Mexico border activists tend to stress issues related to immigration, labor exploitation, the disappeared, and violence against women. But as the interviews for this book show, even women's border issues transcend their localism. The human rights issues articulated at the U.S.-Mexico border resonate deep within Mexico and raise some of the core human rights issues articulated at the Beijing conference. Consequently, while I focus on Mexican and Mexican American women's NGOs, I find two important patterns that apply to the activism of Latinas and third world women more generally: (1) the recent emergence of NGOs focused specifically on women's issues and (2) the stress that women's activism in Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico border communities places on affiliations across ethnicity, race, and class, often leading these struggles for women's and human rights to encompass other issues, including environmental ones, as Claudia Sadowski-Smith (2002)

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notes. Despite differences in mobilizing strategies, women's groups in Michoacán and in El Paso / Ciudad Juárez are strikingly similar.

The two communities highlight new directions in women's activism. But to understand these women's communities, we must first examine the particular historical events that inform their activist strategies. Doing so sheds light on how two distinct women's communities speak to activist strategies generally and Latina activism specifically, as well as on their visions of global feminist futures. The following is a brief historical background of the two women's communities I study in this book.

BACKGROUND ON THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN MEXICO

Before 1980, feminist organizations in Mexico found it difficult to make inroads with women of the grassroots or, as some put it, popular sector (Espinosa Damián and Sánchez Olvera 1992: 17). During the late 1960s to 1970s only a limited feminist discourse circulated among grassroots women's groups. Early in the Mexican women's movement, a distance separated grassroots women from, for lack of a better word, academic feminism. Women I interviewed for this book noted that Mexican feminists in the 1960s and 1970s were middle- to upper-class academics who spent little time working with grassroots women. In the 1980s all that changed. At the Primer Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres (First National Women's Gathering) in Mexico City in 1980 Mexican feminists discovered the differences between their interests and those of women of the popular sector, and they were challenged by the dialogue with them (ibid.: 18). The Encuentro was the first meeting where the women's groups represented cut across class lines. It lasted three months and attracted around five hundred women, most representing poor urban barrios.

According to the Mexican feminist historians Gisela Espinosa Damián and Alma Rosa Sánchez Olvera (1992), those in attendance generally came from independent popular organizations such as the Frente Popular Tierra y Libertad (Land and Liberty Popular Front) of Monterrey, a number of *comunidades eclesiales de base* (base Christian communities, or CEBS),[4] and women from the "10 de abril" community in the state of Morelos. Repre-

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sentatives from greater Mexico City included the residents of Ixtapalapa and Netzahualcóyotl, as well as of the *colonias* of Guerrero, Ajusco, and Cerro del Judío. Rural communities were represented by a peasant movement that was quite visible at the time, including the community of Venustiano Carranza in the state of Chiapas, as well as communities in Veracruz, Aquila, and Michoacán. Also present were union organizers and representatives of other NGOs, including militant women from the Nicaraguan Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front) and from a number of Salvadoran and Guatemalan grassroots organizations. According to Espinosa Damián and Sánchez Olvera (1992), among the NGOs central to the planning and technical support for the Encuentro were Comunicación, Intercambio y Desarrollo Humano en América Latina (Communication, Exchange, and Human Development in Latin America, or CIDHAL) and Mujeres para el Diálogo (Women for Dialogue, or MPD).

Consequently, the Mexico City conference was the first to represent the grassroots mobilization that has characterized the present-day women's movement in Mexico. The diversity of this gathering and subsequent Encuentros forced women's groups in Mexico to think and mobilize across class and racial lines. Since then grassroots women's NGOs have proliferated. Lorenia Parada Ampudia's analysis of a 1992 directory of women's NGOs identified eighty-eight that worked with grassroots women's groups (Talamante Díaz, Careaga Pérez, and Parada Ampudia 1994: 5). Of those, forty-seven (53 percent) were located in Mexico City, the rest being distributed throughout fourteen states. The same analysis showed that eighteen (20 percent) of these NGOs were founded before 1981, twenty-two (25 percent) between 1981 and 1985, thirty-three (37 percent) between 1986 and 1990, and eight (9 percent) between 1991 and 1992 (a small number reported no founding dates). Parada Ampudia's findings show that after the 1980 Encuentro the Mexican women's movement increased its ties with grassroots sectors. Also significant was the number of the NGOs springing up outside Mexico City, a decentralization that would be critical to women activists working in Mexican states that traditionally receive little attention from the central government.

Cecilia Talamante Díaz, Gloria Careaga Pérez, and Lorenia Parada Ampudia (1994: 339) identified five themes guiding the objectives of Mexican

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women's NGOs: (1) fortification of women's organizations, (2) changing women's conditions at work and in the home, (3) defending victims of gender violence, (4) promoting better health conditions, and (5) addressing class issues of inequality. Health concerns related to reproductive health and violence. They also show that the NGOs primarily worked with women from peasant, indigenous, and colonia communities. How the Michoacán women's NGOs worked, how they linked class and race issues to gender issues, and to what extent they were linked to other grassroots groups (not focused on gender) were questions posed in this study. Women's NGOs in Michoacán and their networks became increasingly visible during preparations for the Beijing conference.

THE BEIJING PREPARATIONS

Approximately twenty women's NGOs in Michoacán mobilized in the "Toward Beijing" efforts. Listed below, they were founded between 1983 and 1993, with a majority after the late 1980s. A June 1995 general assembly report, found in the Equipo de Mujeres en Acción Solidaria (Team of Women Solidary in Action, or EMAS) archives, noted that it was not until the Michoacán State Coordinating Committee formed to prepare for Beijing that local network organizing heightened (Minutes 1995). The report highlighted activities that the committee supported, including International Women's Day, the Campaign for Children's Day, and the Day of Action for Women's Health, to mention a few of the activities designed to lead women's local groups to collaborate and network with each other.

The Michoacán State Coordinating Committee became important for its role on several other panels. It developed ties to the Central Region Organizing Committee and to other networks that linked the Michoacán board to Mexico's national "Toward Beijing Leading Committee." The latter was important because it facilitated access to prominent actors in the national women's movement, providing opportunities for alliance with their NGOs. The "Toward Beijing Leading Committee," for example, consisted of figures including Itziar Lozano of Red entre Mujeres (Network among Women), Lorenia Parada Ampudia of the Programa Universitario sobre Estudios de Género (University Gender Studies Program, or PUEG), Patricia Duarte of

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the Colectivo de Lucha contra la Violencia hacia las Mujeres, A.C. (Fight against Violence toward Women Collective Inc., or COVAC), Lucero González of the Sociedad Mexicana pro-Derechos de la Mujer (Mexican Society for Women's Rights), and Cecilia Loría of the Grupo de Educación Popular con Mujeres (Group for Popular Education with Women, or GEM). Access to members of the "Toward Beijing Leading Committee" was crucial because they met with other groups in Latin America and the Caribbean to advance issues important to Mexican women.

As part of the preparations, the UN's "Toward Beijing" organizers had divided Latin America into five regions: (1) the Andean countries, (2) Brazil, (3) Central America, (4) Mexico, and (5) the Caribbean. For its part, Mexico's Central Region Organizing Committee brought state NGO committees into preparations for Beijing. The state committees were organized by region, linking Michoacán with other states in central Mexico (Aguascalientes, Colima, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Morelos, Puebla, Querétaro, and San Luis Potosí). A report, titled *Hacia la IV Conferencia mundial sobre la mujer en Pekín (hoy Beijing)*, or *Toward the Fourth World Conference on Women in Peking (Today Beijing)*, published by the Central Region Organizing Committee, revealed an extensive network that became important to the women's groups in Michoacán (Coordinadora de la Region Centro 1994).

This book explores how the "Toward Beijing" networking efforts opened up grassroots mobilizing opportunities locally, nationally, and transnationally. Social movement theorists stress the importance of networking, which "open[s] up access to participation" (Kriesi et al. 1995: 53). Networking also makes groups and individuals aware of "the availability of influential allies" (ibid.), creating or enhancing political opportunities and giving participants "a good sense of the important advantages of block mobilization of activists" (Zald 1992: 334). The experience of Tomasa Sandoval, an indigenous leader I interviewed from the Purépecha Nation of Michoacán, illustrates this point well. Sandoval became active in the women's movement during the "Toward Beijing" process. The network opportunities enhanced indigenous women's causes locally and brought them closer to the larger women's movement. Sandoval was pivotal to the process as a leader and spokesperson of Mujeres Grupo Erandi de Pichátaro (Erandi Women's

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Group of Pichátaro), one of two Purépecha women's NGOs that participated in the "Toward Beijing" efforts in Michoacán. Sandoval also linked local women's groups to the broader Purépecha Nation, in which she also was a leader. The opportunities for exchange with local indigenous communities made local NGOs more aware of the plight of indigenous people throughout Mexican society, as events in Chiapas, with its indigenous insurrections, have underscored.

The political struggles for indigenous recognition in Michoacán and throughout Mexico have a long history. Indigenous people's fight for land and against political and economic marginalization parallels much of the history of Mexico's peasantry more generally (Velázquez 1992). However, differences between indigenous struggles and those of the broader peasantry emerge when we consider the system of class and gender domination, which has produced a particular type of marginalization for indigenous people since the colonial period. The system of race, gender, and class domination has exposed indigenous women to triple jeopardy. Margarita Velázquez (1992: 48–49) argues that indigenous men, although marginalized by race and class, have been able to establish limited relationships with the larger Mexican mestizo society, but indigenous women have not. Even when government policy toward Mexico's indigenous people began to change (1920–40), indigenous women were "confined to their communities, without possibilities of any major contact with mestizo society" (ibid.: 49). Velázquez argues this essentially gave indigenous women no access to an indigenous educational politics. During the 1970s, this politics would be challenged by an indigenous movement that itself would be challenged by indigenous women. I discuss this point further in chapter 1.

Suffice it to say here that Tomasa Sandoval's leadership in the Michoacán women's NGO and Purépecha Nation networks brought her to national prominence, as she would be named "national coordinator for indigenous women." Her leadership and the presence of indigenous women's NGOs like Mujeres Grupo Erandi de Pichátaro would be symbolic of the growing diversity of the women's movement in Mexico.

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While Michoacán women's NGOs reached out beyond the state capital, Morelia, to surrounding towns, as well as state, national, and international organizations, women's NGOs in greater El Paso / Ciudad Juárez networked much more locally. Why the difference? Is it less crucial than what the two communities can teach us about grassroots women's organizing more generally? The more local focus in El Paso / Ciudad Juárez was not necessarily a limitation. What this book shows is that success in women's mobilization should not be measured primarily in terms of ability to mobilize material resources or move in vast networks. While these are significant, I argue that for many marginalized people success lies more in moving women to action in public and private spheres. In other words, while forming organizations to fight labor exploitation, homelessness, and broader political exclusion is important, empowering women to fight domestic violence and to gain a sense of themselves as people with a voice outside and within the home is just as important. As the women I interviewed express, the path from personal to broader women's issues is often the road to women-centered activism.

One could argue, as I do here, that the differences between NGO mobilization in El Paso / Ciudad Juárez and in Michoacán result from the specific histories that tie the women's organizations to their sociopolitical contexts. The mobilization of Chicanas and Mexican American and Mexican women in El Paso / Ciudad Juárez is linked to the history of local movements and to the current politics of the U.S. southwestern borderlands.[5] In other words, just as women in Michoacán have had to face off against the particular class and racial histories of Mexico, women of Mexican descent on the U.S.-Mexico border have had to gain their voice in the context of class and racial politics particular to that region. Imelda García of Bienestar Familiar in El Paso related an exchange with a woman she was helping to confront domestic violence; it underscores what the undocumented on the U.S.-Mexico border have to overcome: "When you're dealing with issues of domestic violence, you learn what I learned as I talked to a woman the other day[:] . . . you need to establish something that won't scare us when we call." Some of the women who come to the NGOs are undocumented workers; some fear dishonoring their families if they talk about them pub-

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licly. As García testified, border women's NGOs struggle to help women overcome the feeling that they have to carry the burden of domestic violence to protect the men in their families, whom they sometimes see also as victims because they are unemployed or face racism. NGOs on the border have to empower people in a social context where fear undergirds labor exploitation with racism and sexism. On the U.S.-Mexico border fear takes on other meanings for the uprooted, undocumented, and un- or underemployed.

The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)[6] and the Chicano movement were born in this border reality. But throughout the history of even these political responses to marginalization, one thing has remained constant: the particular status of border women and their fight for political empowerment. In organizations like LULAC that fight for the political rights of peoples of Mexican and, more broadly, Latin American descent in the region, women have had to fight for their place. Belén B. Robles, who ran unsuccessfully for president of LULAC in 1970, noted that "women of Hispanic ancestry or Spanish descent have perhaps a harder time in obtaining equal opportunities because of the machismo that prevails among the Hispanic."[7] Recalling her 1970 defeat, Robles commented that LULAC members "weren't quite ready to have a woman as a national president despite the majority seeing her as the best qualified." Robles was elected president in 1994 and served four consecutive one-year terms.

Prior to Robles's presidency, leadership by the women of LULAC was largely in community organizing and grassroots activism. Mary Lou Armendariz, a member of Ladies LULAC Council 9 of El Paso recalled that much of the council's work centered on preparing people to become citizens and raising money to help underprivileged children.[8] Armendariz and others in the ladies council also became active in election campaigns. In 1957 they supported Raymond Telles for mayor of El Paso. In fact, much of LULAC's work in El Paso during this period consisted of promoting Latinos for public office or civic engagement through social works. But by the early to mid-1960s, these strategies proved ineffective for young Latinos, who saw organizations like LULAC as too mainstream. Many young Latinos joined the new Chicano movement, in which leaders like Reies López Tijerina argued for a land grant, an effort to force the U.S. government to honor its

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1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo with Mexico. Rodolfo (Corky) Gonzales and others founded the Crusade for Justice. The farmworkers' movement took hold under the leadership of César Chávez and Dolores Huerta. And La Raza Unida came to life in Crystal City, Texas, as a third party fighting inequities in the political power structure of Texas and other states where significant numbers of Mexicans and Mexican Americans lived but few held political office.

In "El Movimiento" (the Chicano movement), according to Alma García (1989, 1997), women of Mexican descent gained a new political voice. They critiqued their traditional gender roles in the romanticized Mexican family by demanding a greater leadership role in the Chicano movement. Mexican American women identified as Chicanas to underscore their borderland roots and to challenge the patriarchal culture that cast them as homemakers whose primary responsibility was caring for their children and husbands (Zavella 1987; Segura 1991). These issues came to a head as women in Chicano organizations were relegated to sexist traditional gender roles, where men spoke and women listened or did secretarial tasks. The Chicano movement drew out Chicana feminists as women fought to end sexist oppression within a broader nationalist effort to end racist oppression (Alma García 1989: 220). But in the end, the Chicano movement allowed little room to address the status of women inside and outside the Chicano or Mexican border community. Chicanas saw themselves as triply oppressed because of their race, class, and sex; those who took feminist stances often were accused by Chicanos of being race traitors. Chicanos charged that Chicana feminists were influenced by an ideology from the white mainstream. Chicanos labeled Chicana feminists as "malinchistas," or traitors to the Mexican race. The reference is to Malinche, the indigenous woman who became the translator to Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conqueror of Mexico. In this version of history, Malinche facilitated Mexico's conquest. As Anzaldúa (1999: 5) noted, for many, Malinche, or Malintzín, became "the fallen Eve who 'betrayed' her people." Anzaldúa and other Chicana feminists rejected this version of history, noting that "the Aztec nation fell not because *malinali* (La Malinche or La Chingada) interpreted for and slept with Cortés, but because the ruling elite [within Mexico at the time] had

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subverted the solidarity between men and women and between noble and commoner" (56). These and other challenges to Mexican and U.S. interpretations of women's history were highlighted by Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicana feminists to show how such ideologies subordinate women. These tensions and historical developments underscore why Latinas created their own political spaces in Mexico, on the U.S.-Mexico border, and elsewhere.

In a piece titled "The Woman of La Raza," Enriqueta Longauex y Vásquez, a columnist and cofounder of the New Mexico–based Chicana newspaper *El Grito del Norte*, noted the painful reasons why women's organizations are necessary.

> What usually happens to this woman [Mexican women who challenge their communities] when she tries to become active in the "*Causa*?" [the Chicano cause]. One would think that the movement would provide a place for her. One would think that the organizations would welcome her with open arms and try to encourage her to speak up for her *Raza* [race]. One would think that because of her knowledge and situation the groups would think of liberation schools with child care for the victims of broken homes, in order to teach them culture and history so that they may find self-identity. When she tries to speak of *machismo*, she is immediately put down. . . . She receives nothing but censorship again. She tries so much to speak up and instead finds herself speaking to deaf ears and completely closed minds. (Longauex y Vásquez n.d.)

Women have responded to this marginalization by creating their own political spaces, shaping their organizations to meet a number of objectives, the first of which is to empower their members.

Mexican and Mexican American women who form their own NGOs tend to reject hierarchical forms of governance. In describing the organizational structure of La Mujer Obrera (the Woman Worker) in El Paso, its director, María Antonia Flores, noted: "We do not have a pyramid. We have a collective organization, an organization that functions through a collective working, with respect, and collective unity. Yes, within it we have a board of directors as any organizations needs, . . . but the implementation of our

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work is a circular one as a collective, as equals." Other goals for women's NGOs include forming alliances and coalitions with other groups to maximize efforts, outreach, and solidarity.

Some argue that alliances and coalitions are facilitated on the U.S.-Mexico border because "members of [borderlands] diasporas exhibit multiple loyalties, move between regions, and often become themselves conduits for the increased flow of money, goods, information, images, and ideas across national boundaries" (Sadowski-Smith 2002: 3). As Anzaldúa (1999) noted, the borderland is a place where several cultures, histories, and people's experiences meet and shape politics. In addition, the border's sociopolitical and economic context itself motivates women in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez to seek each other out and organize across class and ethnic boundaries. Undeniably, U.S.-Mexico border experiences draw women into activism, and women's NGOs downplay differences between Mexican and Mexican American border women. In fact, Mexican scholar María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba (1995–96: 154) criticizes the figurative use of the border as "a multicultural space in the United States," arguing that this promotes a narrow view of Chicana/o identities (see also Sadowski-Smith 2002: 2). The U.S.-Mexico border is instead a region that has drawn Chicana/o as well as other Mexican and Mexican American activists into the broader political realm in which border NGOs operate.

Consequently, for many interviewed in this book, *Chicana/o*, rather than being a term for defining oneself as part of a borderlands history different from Mexican, is a marker of their political coming of age in the Chicano movement. Imelda García of the Centro Mujeres de Fe y Esperanza (Faith and Hope Women's Center) of El Paso noted that she came to the women's movement and ultimately to border community work as part of an awakening to the fight for border justice. Her experiences in the Chicano and Chicana movements raised questions for her as she was trying to find her place as a Mexican American in the U.S. women's movement.

> I got involved with a women's group at the university [Sul Ross State University in Alpine, Texas]. And I struggled with it, because we had a lot of differences. I think being right out of the Movimiento Chicano, I could see a lot of differences in the way that we saw issues, because in the

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> Movimiento Chicano, even though we women were pushing and pushing ahead, we saw "a esos hermanos" [those brothers]. We were both being treated wrongfully. You know, treated badly. And so it was very difficult, because we didn't consider them the enemy, and for the women's movement a lot of times the men were the enemy.

García underscores the layering of her activist trajectory, including why mainstream U.S. feminism is limiting for border women. But García's disconnect with mainstream U.S. feminism is part of a larger story. Her experience illustrates why Latina organizations tend to see themselves as part of a "women's" movement rather than a "feminist" one.

This tension is best captured in the observation by the Chicana feminist Martha Cotera (1977: 36) that "all White women 'herstory' publications have been severely criticized for being blatant in their disregard for the pluralistic aspects of our society." For many women of color, feminist organizations in the United States promote "white" women's feminism and are not for them. Not surprisingly, a similar disconnect also exists in Mexico, this time between grassroots (particularly indigenous) women and upper-class *mestiza* (lighter-skinned Spanish-Indian) women. Consequently, women's narratives in this book underscore areas where academic feminists have failed to speak to grassroots women, and so the term *feminist* often is rejected.

Yet the historical disconnects I identify, with all the challenges they pose, have not deterred Latinas from creating new spaces for women's activism. Latinas and non-Latinas on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border —whether indigenous, mestiza, white, or academic feminists—are engaged in an activism that has made possible new feminist or women-centered visions. NGOs have become spaces for women to connect, share their experiences, raise gender consciousness, and develop networks that offer myriad opportunities for social activism. Social and personal crises bring women to NGOs "to network, to interact, and to communicate" on issues central to their needs and from there to "influence, negotiate, and make decisions" that empower them as a group (Melucci 1995: 45). Moving from personal crises, which often begin in local communities, to activism can be an important process in the development of a political voice.

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The political scientist Carol Hardy-Fanta (1993: 18–19) suggests that grassroots politics, as locally based community organizing, is characteristic of the Latina mobilization she observed in Boston; but her analysis highlights a more general pattern in Latina activism: "With their emphasis on grassroots politics, survival politics, the politics of everyday life, and the development of a political consciousness, Latina women articulate connections between the problems they face personally and the issues they face as part of their ethnic communities stemming from government policies [and other practices that marginalize women]." Consequently, women-focused NGOs create and nurture spaces where the personal and political awaken not only gender consciousness but also commitment to social activism, and where coalitions and alliances can be forged through organizing. The latter is a feature of Mexican and Mexican American women's mobilization in Michoacán and in greater El Paso / Ciudad Juárez.

Alliances and coalitions can be formed with groups that may seem unlikely allies. A unique contribution of this book to the study of women's organizing is its look (in chapter 3) at alliances with women's religious organizations. Of note are the contributions of Catholic sisters who are organizing with grassroots women in Mexico and on the U.S.-Mexico border. Some Catholic sisters engage in social activism because Catholic Church policy since the mid-1960s has promoted community work in poor and marginalized communities. Inspired by these changes in policy, women's Catholic religious communities revisited their organizational missions and embraced community work that includes working with women's activist organizations. Some interviewed for this book also noted the influence on them of the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire, who promoted empowering models for working in marginalized communities. Others were inspired by liberation theology and the challenge women brought to it. One of the untold stories in the history of liberation theology in Latin America is the challenge women posed to liberation theologians and the Catholic Church on the question of women's status in society. This also is often left out of discussions of the history of the women's movement in Latin America and in the United States. As I briefly note below, the connection between women's grassroots NGOs and faith-based women's organizations is central to

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understanding the breadth and depth of women's activism in Mexico and on the U.S.-Mexico border.

BRIDGING THE SECULAR AND THE RELIGIOUS: THE RELIGIOUS CONNECTION TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S ORGANIZING

To understand the engagement of Catholic sisters in grassroots women's community work and NGOs, we must consider background events that to some may seem irrelevant. Why did they work for women's causes in grassroots communities in Mexico and on the U.S.-Mexico border? Part of the answer lies in the emergence of liberation theology and subsequent debates in the Catholic Church. Ultimately, women's organizations found liberation theology to have limited benefits for women, and women's faith-based organizations embraced women-centered activism. When liberation theology emerged in 1968 at the Latin American [Catholic] Bishops' Conference in Medellín, Colombia, advocates attacked social and economic injustice and the institutions that promote inequality. From Medellín on, liberation theology came to mean solidarity with the poor as a fundamental religious and ethical concern quite different from any position the Catholic or other church had taken in the past. According to a number of liberation theologians, the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed in society required new economic and political strategies to narrow the enormous gap between rich and poor in Latin America and throughout the third world (Silva Gotay 1981). Liberation theologians were known for supporting poor people's movements, recognizing that social change could only come through political activism. But liberation theologians mostly focused on class inequality and on economic and political policies as its root causes. They paid no specific attention to how inequality is exacerbated by gender effects, an omission challenged by feminist theologians and women's groups.

In pushing liberation theology to focus on gender in the 1970s, women's religious organizations called into question patriarchal religious authority and associated social institutions that conspire to marginalize women. As I discuss in chapter 3, women's religious groups, some led by Catholic sisters,

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banded together with grassroots women's organizations to mobilize against patriarchy and the social institutions that promote it. For both religious and nonreligious women and feminist activists, collective identities are tied to a general goal or theme articulated in women's liberation struggles wherever they manifest themselves. The collective gender-based identities and political articulations in this book highlight the overlap among women's experiences of marginalization and the visions for liberation they share, whether faith-based or not. As I argue in chapter 3, the history of faith-based organizations, such as those discussed in this study, is important to understanding women's activism in larger women's movements. Latina theologians underscore this point in their writings, identifying several reasons for it.

María Pilar Aquino's (1992) book *Nuestro clamor por la vida*, on Latin American theology from the perspective of women, outlines several factors that link the economic, political, and social realities of Latinas in the United States and in Latin America. Aquino analyzes women's experience of both class and gender oppression. In Latino communities where a majority is baptized Roman Catholic, the Catholic colonial legacy continues to play an important role in undermining the position of Latinas in the home, in their communities, and in their churches. Patriarchy here is understood as part of a legacy that conspired against women, as Catholicism not only condoned but advocated granting exclusive rights to men in building on Spanish pre- and postconquest communities. Thus, regardless of Latinas' geographical origins, they share a common Spanish colonial cultural heritage that makes their experience more similar than distinct when it comes to the social institutions they engage in their daily lives. This is why I use the term *Latina* to focus on women's experiences that extend beyond Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico border. Moreover, the kind of transnational bridge-building done by women's NGOs in Mexico and the U.S. Southwest has become increasingly necessary with the advent of global capitalism. The cross-border linkages among Mexican and Mexican American women activists that will be shown in this book help us understand how global feminisms evolve. Of course, Mexicans and Mexican Americans are diverse and do argue among themselves, as writers such as Patricia Zavella (1987) and Pablo Vila (2000) have shown. But the El Paso region is perhaps the most Mexican of U.S. border communities. According to the 2000 U.S. census, 78 percent of El

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Paso residents reported being of "Hispanic" origin (as the U.S. Census Bureau refers to peoples of Spanish and Latin American descent), with 66 percent identifying as Mexican; 71 percent reported speaking Spanish at home; and 27.4 percent reported being foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). Furthermore, Irasema Coronado, Sharon Navarro, and Kathleen Staudt, among other authors whose works I cite in this book, show that NGOs here are engaged in cross-border activism identified with U.S.-Mexico border justice issues. These issues include but are not limited to labor, homelessness, racism, and violence. They have particular consequences for women in their day-to-day lives.

For low-income Latinas, Aquino (1992: 20) argues, daily life is marked by the oppression of a patriarchal *machista* system inherited from Iberian colonialism, the present imperialist-capitalist forms of which subject them to subordination, racial prejudice, increasing poverty, and systematic exclusion on the sole basis of their gender. According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003: 144), that legacy has expanded to a patriarchal dominance and women's exploitation in "the development and operation of a 'new' world order. . . . Third World women workers (defined in this context as both women from the geographical Third World and immigrant and indigenous women of color in the United States and Western Europe) occupy a specific social location in the international division of labor that illuminates and explains crucial features of the capitalist processes of exploitation and domination." These are the forces that bring Latinas together and that motivate us to challenge dominance that controls us in our homes and in society at large. And while men's status and their complicity to promote institutions of privilege can vary by class and race, patriarchy bestows on all men rights over women. Under this system, men rule at home and it is up to women to protect the "honor of the family." As Rosa Linda Fregoso (2003: 18) notes, in this context "violence against women and sexual assault are typified in law as crimes against the honor of the family, rather than as crimes against the personal, physical integrity and human rights of the woman victim." Fregoso suggests that such views reinforce "a discourse that discourages women from leaving the private sphere, the purported site of patriarchal protection and authority: public space is imagined as inherently dangerous" (ibid.). Men, in contrast, regardless of their own class- or race-based mar-

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ginalization, can appeal to the patriarchal privileges that at least give them power over women. Still, it is true that poor people's movements can create opportunities for race-, class-, and gender-based alliances, though these are often framed as separate struggles, with good reason. The Chicano movement offers one example of how alliances are used. Fighting against the social institutions that have marginalized women does not always mean rejecting them and beginning anew.

Instead, women subvert first their family roles, then their roles in the community, sometimes beginning in their churches. Latina activism in base Christian communities is often cited as an example of how women challenge traditional spaces, transforming them into sites for community activism where women are empowered. Susan Eckstein (1999: 8) notes that "Base Communities have been a force behind a range of movements." Aquino (1992, 19) adds that "today's popular social movements and the different base Christian communities recognize the role of women everywhere in their community." Research on these base Christian communities shows that community projects have had two basic goals: day-to-day survival and the democratic participation of their members in interpersonal relations, in the group's struggle against authoritarianism, and in its relationships with other grassroots organizations (Montes 1987: 83). These grassroots groups seek to confront hunger and poverty and to strengthen popular organizations by incorporating women. Consequently, I focus on pastoral and community work that is linked to women's activism. To ignore this broader dimension of Latina religious practice, that is, its mobilization in community or pastoral work, would be to misunderstand the complex ways in which Latinas become agents of social change and what they bring to feminism and larger women's movements.

COALITIONS, ALLIANCES, AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZING

The research I conducted in Mexico and on the U.S.-Mexico border shows that Latinas define themselves as women in public spheres that engage a broad spectrum of women's activism across ethnic, class, and religious boundaries. I contend that Latina activism advances women's issues, claiming myriad identities while at the same time furthering the interests of larger

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Latina/o communities. Looking at Latinas and the cultural context in which they operate helps us understand why women work in women's NGOs that also engage broader community issues. The sociologist Mary Pardo (1998a: 228), who studied the Los Angeles neighborhoods of Boyle Heights and Monterey Park, noted that "in both communities, women's activism originated in family concerns and community networks, then generated broader political involvements." More significant is Pardo's observation that "within the circumstances of [Latina's] lives, they use existing gender, ethnic, and community identities to accomplish larger political tasks" (ibid.). These larger political missions are often responses to political or economic contexts that marginalized communities, and women in particular, face in a changing global economic context.

Having organizations that can draw women to act against such forces is critical to improving women's lives globally. Developing strategies to confront the forces of global capitalism is no easy task, and it requires collaboration among like-minded people. Women in the two communities I studied identified core issues that their NGOs address, including the marginalization of women by a patriarchal system of dominance; violence against women; the increasing number of single women who head households and raise families while under- or unemployed; abuse of low-income workers that affects women in particular ways; and health, environmental, and other issues that link women to larger human-rights concerns.

To confront the global political and economic forces that women face, women's NGOs recognize the potential political benefit of coalitions and alliances. I see an important distinction between these two forms of association. As Papusa Molina (1990: 329) notes, *coalitions* are about "achieving goals as the main objective, but [they are] often characterized by temporary strategizing." When objectives are achieved, coalitions often disband. This is sometimes a useful strategy, as it was for women's NGOs preparing for the Beijing conference. But alliances have greater potential: formed around commitments to individuals, they bring together organizations with a shared vision of how society can be improved, a vision sustained throughout the duration of a movement and among networks of committed activists.

Where appropriate I also use the terms *women-centered movement* and

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women's movement because, as Muruja Gonsález Butrón of Equipo Mujeres en Acción Solidaria (EMAS) of Morelia noted, "the term *feminist* for grassroots women is something little understood." As the vignette with which I opened this introduction reveals, it is a term that circulates primarily among academic women and that when used in NGOs is rarely understood and is sometimes seen as divisive. There is the sense that *feminism* means something radical, separatist, and different from other women's desire for an inclusive liberation of the oppressed in their society. Outside feminist circles, feminism is seen as excluding and bashing men, with no real meaning for the day-to-day experiences of grassroots women. These women also feel that marginalized men stand to gain from a women's liberation movement (as opposed to a feminist one that bashes men). Therefore, in studying women's NGOs in Mexico and the U.S. Southwest, I examined the contributions of women activists as they articulated their political activism in practices and visions for an inclusive global feminism.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

My comparative analysis of Latina women's NGO activism in Michoacán and greater El Paso/Ciudad Juárez showed me how mobilization patterns can differ even between communities that share a culture and history. More important, the research illuminated the social context in which Latinas mobilize in NGOs as part of our participation in larger women's movements—in my view, consistent with global feminism.

In oral history interviews, I began by asking eighteen basic questions focusing on organizational history: how the leader of the organization got involved in the women's movement; the organization's goals; and its financial sustainability, publications, outreach, and networks. In feminist research (Behar and Gordon 1995; Reinharz 1992), oral histories allow participants in a study to reflect on their experiences, what they believe, how they came to build their organizations, and how those beliefs have impacted their everyday lives and those of their fellow activists. It was with these intentions that I approached my interviews. Using a "snowball sample," continuing until I no longer found new NGOs mentioned in interviews, I identified sixteen organizations within the network cluster in Michoacán. I

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began this sampling with the Equipo de Mujeres en Acción Solidaria because EMAS was an organization mentioned in the literature as having network ties to Mujeres para el Diálogo (Women for Dialogue, or MPD), the organization that challenged the Latin American Bishops' Conference in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979, as I discuss in chapter 3. EMAS also met my criteria of a faith-based women's organization in a larger women's movement, one in which its leader and cofounder, Gonsález Butrón, was a central figure. My interview with her led me to other women leaders and to the EMAS archives, where I found the names of other women's NGOs in Michoacán. From January 1995 to July 1995, I interviewed twenty leaders of women's NGOs, primarily in Michoacán. The four interviews in Mexico City included women leaders who helped me document historical events and understand ties to NGO leaders in Michoacán.

The Michoacán NGOs included, in Morelia, the Asociación de Ayuda Mutua (Mutual Aid Association), the Centro de Apoyo a la Salud Alternativa (Center for Support of Alternative Health, or CASA), the Centro de Atención a la Mujer Violentada (Center for Women Victims of Violence, or CAMVI), the Centro de Servicios Municipales Heriberto Jara (Heriberto Jara Municipal Services Center, or CESEM), the Equipo de Promoción a la Salud Comunitaria (Promotion Team for Community Health, or EPROSCO), EMAS, Michoacanos Unidos por la Salud y contra el Sida, A.C. (Michoacanos United for Health and against AIDS, Inc., or MUSSAC), Mujeres del Magisterio Democrático (Women for Democratic Teaching), Mujeres Grupo Erandi de Pichátaro (also known as the Mujeres de la Nación Purépecha), the Taller Permanente de Estudios de la Mujer de la Escuela de Mujeres de la Universidad Michoacana, San Nicolás de Hidalgo (Permanent Research Group for Women's Studies at the Women's Program of Michoacán University, San Nicolás de Hidalgo), and VenSeremos (whose name can be understood as either "We Will Win" or "Come and We Will Be"); in Nocutzepo, Mujeres de Nocutzepo; in Pátzcuaro, the Centro de Estudios Sociales y Ecológicos (Center for Social and Ecological Studies, or CESE), the Grupo Civil de Mujeres Gertrudis Bocanegra (Gertrudis Bocanegra Civil Women's Group), and Mujeres por la Democracia (Women for Democracy); and, in Uruapán, the Asociación Ecologista Viva Natura (Live Nature Ecological Association). The four women interviewed in

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Mexico City were Eleonor Aida Concha of MPD, Itziar Lozano of Red entre Mujeres; María Consuelo Mejía of Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (Catholic Women for the Right to Choose), and Alma Tamez of the Asociación de Pastoras (Association of Women Pastors).

Using the same snowball sample technique, I identified thirteen NGOs in greater El Paso/Ciudad Juárez. For similar comparison to the Michoacán organizations, I chose the Centro Mujeres de Fe y Esperanza in El Paso to begin this half of the study. I began in El Paso because I was working at New Mexico State University at the time and the Centro was a women's faith-based NGO in the United States similar to EMAS with a membership composed predominantly of Chicanas, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans, that is, one with the same cultural and historical heritage as women in Mexico. In particular, I was looking for communities to compare across borders, because, as sociologist Valentine Moghadam (2000) argues, transnational feminist networks have become increasingly important for women's collective action in the era of globalization. It also became clear as my study progressed that the Centro was the women's organization most mentioned by other women's groups in El Paso/Ciudad Juárez as one with which their NGOs shared programs, personnel, and events. This indicates the Centro's pivotal regional role, similar to that of EMAS in Michoacán.

From the thirteen NGOs identified in the greater El Paso/Ciudad Juárez area, sixteen leaders were interviewed. Two Chicanas who have worked in the Southwest with women's groups and other activist organizations were included because they helped clarify historical events in the region. In total, the study that is the basis for this book included thirty-nine interviews. Those in greater El Paso/Ciudad Juárez were conducted from spring 1998 to summer 1999. The El Paso/Ciudad Juárez women's NGOs included, in El Paso, Annunciation House, the Battered Women's Shelter, Bienestar Familiar (Family Well-Being), La Mujer Obrera, the Centro Mujeres de Fe y Esperanza, La Posada (The Inn), and the YWCA; in Ciudad Juárez, the Centro Mujeres Tonantzín (Tonantzín Women's Center), the Centro para el Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer, A.C. (Center for the Complete Development of Women Inc., or CEDIMAC), the Centro Mujeres de Fe y Esperanza, and the Organización Popular Independiente (Popular Independent

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Organization, or OPI); and, in Anthony, Texas/New Mexico, the Women's Intercultural Center and Mujeres Unidas (Women United).

As chapter 2 will show, a distinguishing feature of women's organizing in El Paso/Ciudad Juárez is their locally based mobilization strategies. Historical reasons for these dynamics are discussed further in chapter 2. Diana Bustamante, executive director of the Colonias Development Council of Doña Ana County, New Mexico, shared her thoughts on border mobilization strategies: "One of the phenomena of the Southwest is that we're immediate—working on a day-to-day survival basis." Bustamante noted that border issues come with specific demands. Francisca Montoya, who also has years of experience in community work in the Southwest believed that border cities, even large ones like El Paso (pop. 564,000), tend to organize almost exclusively at the neighborhood level.

These and other factors are important to understand, because one could get the impression that women's NGOs in Michoacán are more effective, given the extent of their networks and given their mobilization beyond the local level. I caution readers to reserve judgment until the end of the book. Political activism at any level can be daunting. People organize for social change and adopt strategies that make practical sense and maximize efforts. My own thinking was challenged by a plaque that hung on the wall of one of the women's NGOs I visited as I began this research. It read: "Think globally, act locally." Borrowed from the international environmental movement, the slogan reflects some of the women's thinking: no matter how small the effort, we are fighting for women's rights globally when we engage in our own local communities.

This book offers insight into how women working together can be effective even if efforts remain local. Grassroots women in this book offer their organizing stories as part of their view of struggles that bring women together to fight for social justice. As Tomasa Sandoval of Michoacán noted, "We are participating because we believe that the only way that we can really move ahead as women is to be united and organized to fight for gaining [political] space as women." María of El Paso said, "[My] own experiences with family violence connected me to fight for broader women's issues, because family violence has devastated me."[9] She now works in NGOs in

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El Paso and Ciudad Juárez to help women gain a sense of themselves and their rights. These and other narratives throughout the book underscore grassroots women's call for global and transnational strategies that empower them to action. In looking at two Latina communities in a transnational context, we better understand women's mobilization, how they become agents of social change, and how they are shaping our feminist future.

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