

7 The impact of guerrilla participation on K'iche' women's collective identity formation process

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The essay presents an analysis of the relationship between revolutionary mobilization and collective identity formation processes of K'iche' women. What happens to women's collective identity formation process if activists do not map a site for gendered expressions and demands within the revolutionary movement? The essay analyzes the way in which the interaction between centralized decision-making structures and decisions related to women's bodily expressions of identity – such as traditional garb – have affected the dynamic of collective identity formation in the post-war period. It is argued that the modalities of K'iche' women's activism – specifically the demand of obedience and of laying down their traditional garb – have posed many obstacles in the process of constructing an empowered gender identity. However, activists have also been skillful in exploring niches in which they could critically reflect on their own emancipation on the basis of Mayan *cosmovisión*.

El ensayo presenta un análisis de la correlación entre la movilización revolucionaria y la creación de una identidad colectiva de las mujeres K'iche'. El proceso de creación de identidad empezó durante el conflicto armado, así que surge la pregunta ¿Qué sucede con ese proceso cuando activistas revolucionarias no crean un marco para expresiones y demandas genéricas? El ensayo analiza cómo la interacción entre estructuras centralizadas y decisiones relacionadas con la expresión corporal de una identidad femenina (como el traje indígena) ha afectado la dinámica de crear una identidad colectiva en el periodo de postguerra. Se cuestiona que las modalidades de activismo de mujeres K'iche' - en concreto la demanda de obediencia y de abandonar su traje tradicional - han presentado varios obstáculos en el proceso de formar una identidad genérica empoderada para las mujeres K'iche'. Sin embargo, activistas han demostrado habilidad en la exploración de nichos en los cuales pueden considerar críticamente su emancipación, basada en la *cosmovisión* Maya.

Introduction

We did not have a gender consciousness, before and during the war, but unconsciously, we hoped that with change in society and from the class struggle, there was going to be a situation of equality for women. Unconsciously that was the feeling... They [the men of the Left] always said that this [the women's] struggle was secondary; always said that the problem was capitalism and I think we believed that because we didn't know the depth of our situation.

Lety Mendez (cited in Shayne 2004: 1)

This essay explores how the identity formation process of Guatemalan K'iche' women has been shaped by their participation in popular movements in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Specifically, it analyzes the impact of elite discourses – i.e., the discourse of the revolutionary leaders – on women's collective identity formation process. It also considers women's own assessment of the link between their activism and their collective identity formation process. The focus on revolutionary mobilization is inspired by the fact that this mobilization in many ways facilitated women's entry into public life, and presented them with new possibilities, ideas, and skills (Light 1992; Ray and Korteweg 1999). Therefore, the civil conflict is often seen as the background against which indigenous women's emancipation started to take shape (Luciak 2001; Berger 2006).

The essay pays special attention to the issue of bodily expressions and determinants of a collective identity, and to how these were dealt with during the period of revolutionary activism, both by K'iche' women themselves and by the leaders – usually men – of the revolutionary organizations. The paper argues that initially, the formation of a collective identity was a priority neither for women activists nor for their leaders. This means that initially, relatively little explicit thinking had gone into how to shape the identity formation process, or into what type of collective identity was envisioned (e.g., a gender awareness tied to ethnic and class awareness, an empowered identity, the role of traditional indigenous beliefs for a shared gender identity, etc.). This initial absence of a preconceived strategy was soon replaced, however, by conscious efforts to critically rethink elements of K'iche' women's collective identity on the basis of Mayan *cosmovisión* in the aftermath of the armed conflict. Still, the relationship between gender awareness and ethnic awareness, and the role of authoritarian relations within the social movements, and the conceptualization of emancipation, needs to be considered when analyzing the link between revolutionary mobilization and K'iche' women's collective gender identity. To analyze these issues, the paper is structured as follows. Firstly, the theoretical

section sets out the framework on collective identity formation that underlies this research. Then the methods are outlined and the situation of Guatemalan K'iche' women during and after the armed conflict is briefly discussed. The body of the text then sets out the key findings of the research in relation to the discourse on gender and the effects this had on K'iche' women's identity formation. The essay concludes with a discussion of prevailing understandings of an emancipated identity.

Theoretical framework

Underlying this paper is a constructivist view of identity, whereby identity is not seen as a pre-given, but rather as a symbolic representation with boundaries that are flexible and constantly reproduced through social interaction (Cooper and Brubaker 2000). The essay reckons that identity formation at the group level can have roots in objective interests or shared culture, as well as being an elite-driven process. Especially in the context of the Guatemalan civil war, a focus on leaders' discourses is justified, since revolutionary leaders had privileged access to information and controlled the transmission of knowledge, which increased their ideological power (see Foucault 1979; Laraña 1994). This justifies a double focus, on the one hand on how leaders discussed collective identities, and on the other, on how K'iche' women activists experienced this issue.

The essay sees identity formation processes at the collective level as a process in which the involved actors come to think of themselves as distinctive from members of other groups with whom they interact, and stresses the relational, processual, and contextual component of identity formation (Barth 1969). Collective identities can be empowering and emancipating in the sense that they trigger an awareness of common problems and resources, and nourish the idea of being an actor in one's own life. Collective identity can, in other words, be a stimulus for collective action for the advancement of the group, since it tips the cost-benefit balance of any action towards the collective level and justifies engagement in activities that have no immediate benefit for the individual – such as participating in protest marches (Drury 1999). This also means that the stronger a collective identity of a group is, the more leverage this group will potentially have on policy, because its members will be more motivated to mobilize (Laraña 1994). An empowered identity is thus key to a successful emancipation and vice versa.

This theoretical framework inspires a focus on women's revolutionary activism during the civil war as a determinant of collective identity formation. As several studies argue, it is during conflict that women erode typical male arenas and redefine behavioral and institutional boundaries and borders. This questions traditional boundaries and redefines roles, and provides women with

opportunities for social participation (e.g., MacDonald 1987; Shayne 2004). This social participation has the potential to change social awareness and introduce women to new ideas of equality, a newly gained sense of rights. It also facilitates economic independence, and the creation of networks and skills that can be used later on (Molyneux 1985; Blumberg 2001).

Methods

Since academic literature of the time does not focus on the participation of K'iche' women in indigenous movements (Hernández 2005), interviews are the most important source of information. The essay is based on a discourse analysis of interviews with revolutionary leaders, K'iche' guerrilleras, and current indigenous feminist activists. In the framework of research on the influence of armed conflict on protest strategies of the women's movement in Central America, I conducted 74 interviews with Nicaraguan and Guatemalan women and former activists.¹ As Silverman (2006: 10) underlines, interviews do not give direct access to facts or experiences because historical memory is constantly reworked in light of the current situation. Interviews can therefore merely offer people's interpretations and representations of facts and events. However, accepting this means taking into account the fact that different interviewees have different relations to the phenomena they describe, which deserves attention in its own right. Moreover, I aimed partially to overcome the lack of stability by conducting a large number of interviews on similar topics and by triangulating interviews with documentary resources where possible. For analytical clarity, the number of direct citations is limited, and instead, the essay presents the findings of the analysis of the combined interviews.

In addition to this, I reconstructed the discourse of revolutionary leaders on the basis of documents from the recently discovered Guatemalan Historical National Police Archive (AHPN). This archive – to date – contains, among other things, a collection of 297 confiscated revolutionary pamphlets. I analyzed these documents in terms of gendered messages. The analysis was further refined and double-checked during focus groups and personal conversations on this topic with former guerrilleras. This way it was also possible to discern the interplay between the discourse of the leaders – expressed in the pamphlets – and the everyday discourse of activists in relation to gender and collective identity. The data gathering consisted of a constant movement between a close reading of the text² on the one hand, and a consideration of the wider social and cultural processes on the other hand, because discourses can only be understood in reference to the culture and society in which they arise (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 2). To understand this social context, the next section considers the situation of Guatemalan K'iche' women during and after the civil war.

Socio-cultural situation of K'iche' women during the armed conflict

K'iche' people are the largest indigenous group in Guatemala, and were one of the groups most heavily targeted during the civil war (Esparza 2005). This civil war was one of the fiercest armed conflicts the Latin American subcontinent knew in the last decades – in terms of duration, number of people killed and maimed, and repressive government strategies (Koonings and Kruijt 1999). Yet, at the same time, the conflict is often referred to as the background against which both indigenous people and women came to think of themselves as sharing a collective identity (Fagan 1999; Luciak 2001). In several respects, it can therefore be seen as the starting point for the emancipation of both groups.

The motivation for analyzing the collective identity formation process of K'iche' women in particular is twofold. Firstly, they present a case of a group that had little or no feeling of commonness on the basis of their gender before the armed conflict (Torres 1999). Secondly, because K'iche' women were particularly active in the guerrilla forces (CEH 1999 par. 82: 108–23), they were exposed to the rhetoric of revolutionary leaders that acted as an – unintended – catalyst in their collective identity formation process.

Socio-cultural situation of K'iche' women

For the purpose of this essay, three aspects are particularly important to point out in relation to the situation of K'iche' women during the civil conflict.

Firstly, before the conflict, neither K'iche' people as a group nor K'iche' women shared a strong sense of common belongingness or collective identity (Kellogg 2010). It was not until the beginning of the early 1990s that indigenous women began creating spaces to organize themselves and recover the cultural demands of their people (Hernández 2005). Furthermore, K'iche' people – and women in particular – had a history of deprivation and relative invisibility and were discriminated against in many ways (Stern 1998). K'iche' women thus found themselves in a situation of double discrimination and invisibilization, and their daily activities were in many cases restricted to the domestic sphere. Limited economic power, lack of property and inheritance rights, low literacy and paid-employment rates, conservative gender-ideologies and conservative Catholicism further restricted women's options at both the micro and macro level (Palencia Prado 1999).

Another factor that initially hampered the formation of an independent collective gender identity is the idea of complementarity – rather than equality – that is the fundament of Mayan cosmovisión. The concept of complementarity – an ideal rather than an experienced reality in many cases – refers to a wide scope of exchange and interrelations between animals, the cosmos, nature, and energy,

but also between men and women (Jocón Gonzales 2005). This idea appears incompatible with mainstream feminist demands for equality. Yet K'iche' women have actually been able to use it as a resource in their emancipation struggle in the post-conflict period. By critically reinterpreting the idea of complementarity beyond the common understanding of complementarity in gender roles, K'iche' feminists provided a source of inspiration for social transformation. Below, I return to the idea of complementarity, arguing that, despite its initial role, it served to refine and advance K'iche' women's emancipation struggle and process of collective identity formation (Marcos 2010: 205).

A last important factor when analyzing how the collective identity formation process of indigenous women was influenced by their revolutionary activism is the role of traditional garb. Traditional garb is a crucial boundary marker of group identity, because it functions as the physical and bodily expression of differences (Rupp and Taylor 1999). Because of this, it can be seen as an element at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and politics. By taking traditional garb as a case study, one can thus interrelate different societal dynamics and assess how the participation and the bodies of women were politicized. Given the symbolic value of traditional garb, it can potentially serve as a starting point for the construction of a gendered collective identity. I return to this in section 5.3.

K'iche' women's activism during the civil war

Despite the brutal nature of the civil war, the conflict also facilitated women's entry into public life, and to some extent thus held the germs of K'iche' women's collective emancipation process (Torres 1999; Hernández 2005). On the one hand, women also mobilized and became activists during the conflict. On the other hand, women's economic role changed because the civil war entailed the necessity for women to work outside the home. This increased their economic power and participation opportunities. Blumberg (1998) argues that when the economic power of a large enough proportion of women rises, this will be translated into an improvement in macro-level rules about women's rights. Ray and Korteweg (1999) see mobilization and economic advances as a key aspect of emancipation and of an empowered identity, precisely because they present women with new possibilities, ideas, and skills. These new opportunities, they argue, will affect the identity formation process at the group level. As Kampwirth (2004) indicates, however, the effect of participation in popular movements is highly dependent on the nature of the movement and the position of the individual within it. This is an important point, and in the next section, I analyze what the modalities of the mobilization were in order to assess its effects on the identity formation process in the post-war period.

The position of women in top-down and everyday discourse

I argue that the evolution of both a collective ethnic and gender identity was influenced by the discourses and actions to which K'iche' people, and women in particular, were exposed during the civil conflict. Therefore this section considers the attention that was paid to the idea of collective identity formation during the period of civil conflict, both by the leaders of the indigenous guerrilla forces, and in everyday conversation.

Elite discourses

Strategies of the Guatemalan government, such as infiltration, killings, and disinformation campaigns, were aimed at destabilizing popular movements (CEH 1999). These actions have been of particular relevance in shaping the discourse and action of the leaders of these movements. Given the fierceness of the war, leaders focused virtually all attention – both discursively and in their actions – on the war effort, and were largely unaware of, or uninterested in, the gender identity-formation component (Lupe 1983; Interview P, Q). Fierce repression was at the origin of a discursive strategy that was aimed at creating the largest possible base for support, but also inspired the adoption of rigid organizational and communication structures on the part of the popular movements. These were needed to operate efficiently. The desire for efficiency can also be seen as one of the reasons why leaders started to stress the idea of a collective ethnic identity (Holland 2008): this identity – which was largely absent before – could be used as a basis for mobilization (Bayard de Volo 2006a). However, given the context of war, most actions and decisions on the issue of identity were reactions to government actions, rather than expressing a conscious program in terms of identity formation.

Moreover, the implicit construction of a collective identity was fostered only along ethnic lines. Gender played no role in this discourse. An analysis of the 297 revolutionary pamphlets in the AHPN shows that during the civil conflict, women hardly figured in the discourse of the leaders of the popular movements at the national level. There are also no significant differences between the different leftist groups that made up the National Revolutionary Unit for Guatemala (URNG).³ None of these groups addressed women as a group in their pamphlets, nor did they mention specific needs of women, or promise specific rights to women.⁴ While revolutionary movements in that era tended to be gender-blind in many cases, this was not the case in Nicaragua and El Salvador, where the FSLN and FMLN respectively used gendered discourses on many occasions – albeit in a pragmatic and functionalist way – to mobilize women as a group and play on their shared interests (FSLN 1980; FMLN 1990; Shayne 1999: 98). Examples thereof are the posters that call on women – as

a group – to mobilize for the revolution or the pamphlets promising better healthcare and childcare to women (Bujard 2010). While these initiatives too are not *per se* an expression of a great awareness of gendered needs on the part of Salvadoran or Nicaraguan revolutionary leaders, their reference to women as a group, implicitly, fostered the idea of a gendered collective identity (Drury 1999; Bayard de Volo 2006b).

Because gender issues were deemed unimportant by Guatemalan revolutionary leaders, gender equality at the lower levels was a far-distant ideal rather than a daily reality. As one former URNG leader (P) puts it, “Sure, we believed in gender equality, but it was far from being one of our priorities. If it was there, it was there, we weren’t going to oppose it, but certainly we weren’t about to fight for it either, there were more important things going on.” Another testimony (Q) also describes how women’s and society’s lack of interest in gender equality influenced the lack of attention for gender. “The few of us who considered gender equality a relevant issue were unlikely to actually impose measures to arrive at it, simply because that could make conservative men turn their back on us. You should not forget that women weren’t even asking for it themselves.”

Everyday discourse and practice

Interviews confirm that also in the daily operating units in which women were active, gender hardly played a role, and that the situation was not conducive to the creation of a collective gender awareness or of an awareness of the specific needs and interests of women. As one interviewee (K) argued, women did not necessarily take issue with the absence of women’s needs from the goals of their leaders, as the war efforts were seen as a priority by women too. Women adopted the line of reasoning that they needed to fight for ethnic emancipation and the end of the civil war first, and only later on for their own needs as women. They thereby echoed the position of the leaders, for whom creating a collective gender identity was by no means a priority – not even for the pragmatic purpose of mobilizing women more efficiently. In all focus groups and interviews, participants confirmed that both in everyday conversations and in the speeches delivered by the leaders, women’s issues were not problematized, and women’s issues would presumably be solved if forces were united in the fight for the end of economic oppression and authoritarian rule. In ideal terms, this line of argument would result in equal gender relations at the organizational level. What most interviewees describe, however, was that this was not the case in daily life. While some interviewees stressed the fact that leaders of the guerrilla were on average more progressive than the rest of society, others describe how

this was hardly noticeable in everyday actions and relationships within the units. As one interviewee (H) commented, "It looked as if life was going to be better for everyone who joined the guerrilla, men and women all the same. Back then, I never considered that our starting point was different from that of men or that we had the right to demand that they solve this problem in their own communities first before trying to change the whole country. Maybe they never wanted us to come to that conclusion [laughs]."

Discourses of obedience, body politics, and collective identity formation

Despite women's absence from revolutionary pamphlets and propaganda, preliminary findings suggest that the collective identity formation process of women was heavily influenced by the discourse of the leaders of popular movements and by women's participation in these movements. The large numbers of women who were active in the revolutionary movements⁵ could ideally draw on this experience to organize around gender issues later on. Moreover, the new ideals of equality that women were presented with could provide the basis for an empowered identity. It is precisely this involvement of women and how it was structured and impacted their identity formation later on that is important for this essay. Different aspects of this mobilization influenced the identity formation process in different ways.

For one thing, the collective gender identity that occurred was largely an unintended consequence of women's mobilization in the popular movement. While this is understandable and not problematic as such,⁶ how this affected their collective identity formation process should be analyzed. How did the demands of uniformity and obedience, for example, leave their trace on K'iche' women's future collective identity? To analyze this, the effect of two elements surrounding women's mobilization is crucial: closed decision-making models and subjugating body politics.

Closed decision-making models and obedience. Several interviewees (B, E, J) overlap in their assessment that within the popular movements, traditional structures of power were reproduced, if not in practice then at least in how women perceived them. As one interviewee (D) testified, "They [superiors and male comrades] were like my father and brothers, I could not but obey them." Another interviewee (G) argued that, in hindsight, she experienced the group as a hierarchical structure and the leaders (men) as authoritative figures with whom she could not argue. So, *de facto*, through a series of decisions, the group had taken on a vertical structure of obedience that did not easily accommodate the emancipation of women within it. Decision-making structures became even more centralized and closed in March 1982. Operational rules on the part of

the popular movements became stricter in response to General Montt's *beans and bullets* program (McClintock 1985: 242). Demanding obedience in a struggle for emancipation creates the impression of a contradiction, because it demands an attitude of submissiveness on the part of the people it is claiming to emancipate. Moreover, this situation impacted differently upon women than on men, because women came from a situation of double oppression: gender-based and class-based.⁷ This differential impact is especially visible in relation to the policing of the body, which is the focus of the next section.

The regulation of physical expressions of identity. The most prominent expression of their identity for K'iche' women, interviewees argued (J, L, B), is their traditional garb. This garb can be seen as one of the boundary markers that allow groups to distinguish themselves from one another, and is therefore an important material element of collective identities. For practical reasons, activists – both women and men – were required to exchange this traditional garb for more practical or discreet outfits. The impact of laying down traditional garb affected women and men in different ways, for one thing because the difference between traditional and combat-style garments was greater for women than for men (cutting the braids, skirts vs. trousers, etc.), but also because K'iche' women were – on average – linked to community life more strongly and their traditional garb was an expression thereof (Fulchirone 2009). Moreover, women had a different starting position. The latter, however, was not recognized by the leaders, as was illustrated by an ex-URNG leader (P): “The question you ask about women is not relevant here. These demands [about cutting hair, wearing military uniforms, and participating in the activities] were the same for men and women. We wanted an equal society, we treated men and women in an equal way. It's as simple as that.” More importantly, however, demanding that women lay down their traditional garb was significant because it can be seen as a political act: the body is the domain in which politics are made visible. In that sense, imposing rules upon women's bodies once more transformed them into *cuerpos objetificados* at the service of – male – leaders. This way, the – implicit – discourse and demands concerning women's bodies shaped the way in which women mobilized and held the risk of investing women's collective identity with a degree of submissiveness.

Moreover, apart from appropriating women's bodies into a struggle that was not necessarily their own, the act of imposing decisions related to the women's bodily expressions of identity was an explicit political act because it deprived women of a vast array of tools for transgressing. According to Hernández and Krajewski (2009), the body can be seen as a means *par excellence* to fight and denaturalize established categories and to visibilize boundaries. Demanding of women that they conform to the group norm takes away women's possibility

to render borders more visible and to relate to them and transgress them in the process of their identity formation.⁸ This transgression is a crucial part of any process of identity formation. Applied to the context of K'iche' women, this argument suggests that the very act of demanding conformity and uniformity in terms of bodily expressions of identity challenged the occurrence of an empowered collective identity, because markers that identify different groups (men – women) were invisibilized, thus taking away the potential to contest and raise critical voices within the newly created group in which gender differences were not acknowledged.

Several women indicated that having to lay down their traditional garb under those circumstances was disturbing for them, because it was neither their own decision, nor something they were consulted about or prepared for psychologically, nor something they deemed necessary *per se* (Interview A, G, H). Moreover, interviews suggest that this touched upon women's self-image. It affected their belief that they could make their own decisions as independent individuals, because others were deciding for them in one of the most intimate aspects of their life, namely their bodily experiences and expression of their identity (Interview A, C, K). At face value, it thus appeared that, by demanding that women – and men – lay down their traditional garb, traditional frames of reference related to gender were taken away, and that women were not encouraged to reconceptualize their collective gender identity within the movement, since there was very little room for maneuvering or independence. This is arguably a barrier to the construction of an emancipated collective gender identity. This is, however, only one side of the coin. The next section considers how the aforementioned obstacles to the creation of an empowered collective identity have been balanced by K'iche' activists in finding niches for emancipation.

Exploring new ways to emancipation and new forms of empowerment

The fact that decisions within the movement were made top-down rather than enabling women to think critically and make their own decisions – albeit understandable given the context – can hardly be called emancipatory. One interviewee (F) comments, “They told us they needed us to do this or that, go here or there, believe in one thing or another, and that's what we did.” Remarks like these were common during the interviews and illustrated how little room to maneuver women in the guerrilla had to be critical agents in their own emancipation struggle. Nevertheless, the argument can be made that their activism has been a resource for K'iche' women to construct an empowered collective identity. There are two sides to this argument, one based on women's experiences, one pinned on a theoretical consideration.

Firstly, the gender blindness of social movements is nearly universal, but in several cases leads women – or other groups who are marginalized by the very organizations that claim to fight for them – to organize precisely in reaction to this invisibilization (Hale 1997; Zemlinskaya 2010). This has also been the case in Guatemala, where the overlooking of women's concerns fostered critical thinking about this situation among women active in these mixed-gender organizations. Hernández (2005) shows how the Guatemalan civil conflict has been fertile ground for indigenous women to organize and integrate elements of their *cosmovisión* into the political struggle to facilitate their own empowerment. In this same vein, women started to construct their own independent organizational spaces apart from those of the national indigenous movement and from feminist movements. Mama Maquín, for example, was women's response to the overlooking of gender concerns in refugee camp councils. This means that despite the neglect of gender issues and despite the demand of obedience, women have been able to draw on their experience in revolutionary movements to organize their own spaces for critical reflection, in which they could conceptualize how they saw themselves as a group within their nation state, their class, their ethnic group, and against the background of their *cosmovisión*.

This acknowledgement triggers a second consideration with regard to the question of an empowered collective identity, which is also theoretical. The prevailing idea that emancipation is based on equality between men and women (e.g., Aasen 2009) was replaced with the idea of complementarity and duality by indigenous feminists. Based on their revolutionary mobilization and their re-appropriation of traditional beliefs, they developed a culturally relevant model of emancipation that allows for the existence of differences between men and women, and that sees these as desirable to arrive at “respectful, sincere, equitable and balanced relationships” (Gabriel 2004). In this model, the concept of complementarity is not used to avoid talking about power relations, but rather as a tool to highlight the need to rethink culture and collective identities from a perspective of gender equality. This is important to consider when analyzing the situation of K'iche' women in terms of the nature of their collective identity, and suggests that we may have to rethink our concept of an emancipated collective identity altogether, because it is precisely the decentralization of the discourse of a collective identity and of equality that has contributed to the creation of a sense of emancipation in this case. In the face of the individualism promoted by globalizing capitalism, K'iche' women are recovering the values of community, balance, complementarity, and duality as the basis for their shared – empowered – collective identity, and thereby challenging prevailing notions of emancipation and questioning the very premises that underlie feminism.

Conclusion

The modalities of the ethnic emancipation struggle have critically shaped certain aspects of K'iche' women's emancipation process. Documentary and discourse analysis showed that, throughout, the issue of gender-specific needs was one of very low interest to revolutionary leaders, on the one hand because it did not fit the logic of wartime decision-making and priorities, and on the other hand because nobody was explicitly pushing for it. Hence, the discourse on women and gender issues remained characterized by what Edwards and Potter (1992: 162) call "the systematic use of vagueness." To the extent that women came into the discourse at all, there were no explicit policies or discourses related to them. Because the issues remained implicit, women, in most cases, felt as if they too would benefit from their participation in the civil struggle.

Nevertheless, women's participation in these popular movements has been a trigger for the development of a gender awareness. Leaders played a marginal role in this process, and in some respects even presented a barrier to critical thinking by K'iche' women about their own situation as a group. Moreover, the fact that there was only little awareness of, attention to, and interest in the modalities and dynamic of women's collective identity formation process meant that several elements of K'iche' women's collective identity formation process were unintentionally shaped by decisions by leaders, and some aspects of identity were bypassed altogether. Hence, the participation in movements that were pinned on obedience and the forsaking of physical expression of identity is arguably a suboptimal starting point for women to establish an empowered gender identity.

Nonetheless, female participation in guerrilla movements indisputably also fostered the development of critical thinking on an emancipated identity. As soon as military tensions waned, K'iche' women took the opportunity to organize spaces of their own in which they could critically reconsider their own identity. This effort has not only been relevant for K'iche' – and other indigenous – communities, but it also challenges our concept of emancipation and empowerment. The form of emancipation that is advanced is pinned on the idea of complementarity rather than equality and offers interesting avenues for conceptualizing what constitutes an emancipated identity.

In conclusion, the modalities of K'iche women's activism, whereby they were systematically denied a voice, has impacted the way in which these women conceived of themselves as a group, and has left them in a contradictory position. Interviews show that women activists were initially approached with an expectation of submission and that they were invisibilized. Yet, based on in-depth interviews with ex-guerrilleras and indigenous leaders, this essay

argues that the development of an emancipating collective identity of K'iche' women that is emerging today can also be seen as a consequence of women's mobilization, because women reacted precisely to the injustice they perceived in the movements in which they were active. Indigenous feminist thinkers are slowly aiming to overcome contradictions and elements of submissiveness, which entered their collective identity through the modalities of their initial mobilization, by turning to traditional *cosmovisión* as a resource and a framework against which to shape new emancipating identities and relations. They have used their experience of revolutionary mobilization to reject, respond to, and negotiate the structures of domination that frame their lives, and have more specifically done so in reclaiming both indigenous spirituality and feminist ideas long present in the region.

Notes

- 1 Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, most interviews are made anonymous, and only those that are directly cited in the text are mentioned in the appendix.
- 2 Text here refers to both written documents and the interviews.
- 3 I.e., the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms (ORPA), the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), and the National Direction Nucleus of the PGT (PGT-NDN).
- 4 Among the documents by rebel forces retrieved in the AHPN, the only one that makes note of women as a group is one by the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca stemming from 1982, and calls on them to join a protest march.
- 5 There are no precise figures, but accounts, for example, by Rigoberta Menchu, speak of women making up around 30 percent of the combat forces.
- 6 Much of the literature on women's emancipation describes how emancipation comes about as a by-product of participation in social movements (Molyneux 1985; Ray and Korteweg 1999; Bayard de Volo 2006a).
- 7 Other war-related dynamics also impacted differently on men and women, such as the disintegration of community structures. As one woman argued, "I'm not saying that seeing your child die is not awful for a father, but for us it was different, we didn't only suffer more [...] because we spent more time with them, we also suffered with every other mother's son who died, because we see how – with them – our community died" (Interview C).
- 8 According to all of my indigenous interviewees it was perfectly possible to conserve the traditional garb while engaging in activities which are feminist, progressive, and emancipatory.

List of cited interviews

Interview A: ex-guerrillera FAR (Rabinal El Quiché Guatemala, 17 May 2010).

Interview B: ex-guerrillera, victim of wartime gendered violence, founder Actoras de Cambio and Q'anil (Guatemala City, 26 May 2010, 11 February 2011).

Interview C: ex-guerrillera EGP (Transvaal, Guatemala, 17 May 2010).

Interview D: ex-guerrillera EGP (Guatemala City, 2 June 2010).

Interview E: double interview, ex-guerrilleras from the North of Guatemala (Huehuetenango, Guatemala, 14 May 2010).

Interview F: ex-guerrillera FAR, board member of UNAMG (Guatemala City, 24 May 2010).

Interview G: ex-guerrillera PGT NDN, board member DEMI (Guatemala City, 7 June 2010).

Interview H: double interview, ex-guerrilleras, founders Kaqla (Guatemala City, 21 February 2011).

Interview I: ex-guerrillera, academic, member UNAMG, advisor Actoras de Cambio (Guatemala City, 26 January 2011).

Interview J: ex-guerrillera PGT NDN, member Actoras de Cambio (Guatemala City, 26 January 2011).

Interview K: ex-guerrillera ORPA, member Actoras de Cambio (Guatemala City, 15 February 2011).

Interview L: ex-guerrillera FAR, member UNAMG, academic (Guatemala City, 27 May 2010).

Interview M: ex-guerrillera ORPA, member CONAVIGUA (Guatemala City, 26 May 2010).

Interview N: former member Guatemalan Council of Mayan Women (Guatemala City, 23 May 2010).

Interview O: ex-guerrillera, member CODEFEM (Guatemala City, 10 June 2010).

Interview P: male guerrilla leader URNG Quetzaltenango (Guatemala City, 24 May 2010).

Interview Q: male guerrilla leader FAR (Guatemala City 17 May 2010).

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