

MULTICULTURALISM AND GENDERED CITIZENSHIP IN BOLIVIA

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Multiculturalism is a concept that embraces a multiplicity of perspectives. Some researchers claim that the multiculturalism that developed during the 1980s and 1990s in Latin America was the response of countries to indigenous organization and the growing international recognition of indigenous people's rights. These countries responded by reforming their constitutions to recognize multicultural claims (see Sieder 2002). Meanwhile, the critics of multiculturalism point to the close links of multicultural ideas to the neoliberal projects of the states, where the aim is to decentralize and to promote civil society in order to ease the process of dismantling the state and cutting public expenses (Hale 2002; Paulson & Calla 2000).

This essay is part of an anthropological research project that has the overall aim of critically analyzing the project of multiculturalism and its effects and consequences in Bolivia. The project will focus specifically on the question of whether promoting multiculturalism is compatible with the aims of gender equality. Through highlighting the intersection of gender, class and ethnicity, the aim is to explore how power relations, inequality and exclusion are constructed, contested or embraced, and to unravel the role of multiculturalism in this process.²

The problem of whether multiculturalism is good or bad for women has been discussed at length (Okin 1999). Researchers have pointed to the fact that there are no contradictions in relation to the philosophical and political underpinnings of the aims of gender equality and ethnic rights; in fact, they are so interdependent that one could argue that the aims cannot be pursued satisfactorily in isolation from each other (Luykx 2000), or at least that the aims have so much in common that a possibility of working towards a feminist multiculturalism should exist (Okin 1999). Despite these good intentions, there is still recurrent empirical evidence of contradictions emerging out there in reality. On a national political level in Bolivia, it was in relation to the

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² Through the study of organized, indigenous women and men in the department of La Paz, the following research questions will be considered: a) How are female political subjects formed and transformed in the actual Bolivian context? b) To what extent is the feminist project contradicted by the cultural project? c) To what extent are excluding structures in fact reproduced by the indigenous base organizations themselves? d) Under what circumstances can women take on political leadership roles challenging existing gender norms?

neoliberal reforms in the mid-1990s that the two principles of promoting gender equality and paying respect to local cultural practices came into conflict. This produced tensions at the level of government, between researchers, and between indigenous movements and government or development agencies. This tension continues to show itself the more indigenous representatives formulate their own claims calling into question requirements set up by donors and other agents.

In this essay I provide background to enable a discussion of the extent to which the feminist project is contradicted by the cultural project in the Bolivian context, and what the implications or possible risks are in terms of gendered citizenships. I also explore the challenges, in terms of gender equality, for the indigenous movements operating within a framework of the post-neoliberal regime.

Multiculturalism and gender equality

The overall project is situated within a discussion of culture and politics and how they affect each other. The problem of multiculturalism concerns how a state of justice and equality can be established between “those who believe in a unified national culture, those who trace their culture to their ethnic identity, and those who view their religion as culture” (Bauman 1999:vii). One of the claims of multiculturalism is that minority cultures should be protected through special group rights or privileges, because they are not sufficiently protected by the individual rights of their members (Okin 1999:10-11). The issue and entry point to the subject that concerns this project is, to quote Okin, “what should be done when the claims of minority cultures ... clash with the norm of gender equality that is at least formally endorsed by liberal states” (ibid.:9). The usual examples of incompatibilities circle around so-called “family issues” such as the marriage of children, inheritance rules, and female circumcision. In the Andean case there are cultural limitations on female political participation.

“Liberal defenses of group rights urge that individuals need ‘a culture of their own,’ and that only within such a culture can people develop a sense of self-esteem or self-respect, as well as the capacity to decide what kind of life is good for them” (ibid.:12). One could agree, but it depends on how we define the implications of having “a culture of their own.” That is a large discussion; the problem I want to bring up here is that practices and ideologies concerning gender are at the core of culture, and most cultural practices privilege male dominance, in many cases combined with a control of women by men. Furthermore, “the more powerful, male members are those who are generally in a position to determine and articulate the group’s beliefs, practices and interests” (ibid.), which means that there is a risk that group rights based on culture further restrain the possibility for girls and women to develop a sense of self-esteem

and so on. As Okin outlines, the advocates for group rights tend to have a fairly static view of cultural groups and to pay more attention to differences between and among groups than differences within them. They usually pay little or no attention to the private sphere, which is where gender differences are developed and sustained.

The multicultural project also needs to be scrutinized in relation to gender imageries. When cultural differences are highlighted there is a risk that stereotypes are reinforced. There are examples of stereotype images being ascribed to indigenous women who are seen as the prime representatives of "culture." De la Cadena (1995) refers to the process of "Indianization" of women in rural areas of Peru, a process in which ethnicity, class and gender intersect and leave indigenous women on the lowest steps of three hierarchies. De la Cadena's example indicates that if part of the perceived inferiority of Indianness is associated with the perceived inferiority of women, then mobilizing around Indianness will have to address issues of gender inequality at the same time as those of ethnic inequality (Wade 1997:105). There is more to know about how, in what contexts, and with what implications authenticity of Indian culture, so important for the multicultural project, is ascribed to women in the Bolivian context.

There are both conceptual and practical problems related to gender and ethnicity in Bolivia. Since gender relations are at the core of people's cultural identification, using gender relations and female political participation as an entry point will illuminate other aspects of the problem of multiculturalism.

Gender and citizenship

"Citizenship" can refer not only to the right to carry a specific passport but to a concept which sums up the relationship between the individual and the state. The basic claim of Yuval-Davis is that a study of women's citizenship should consider not only their citizenship in relation to men, "...but also in relation to women's affiliation to dominant or subordinate groups, their ethnicity, origin and urban or rural residence" (1997:68). She believes it is also important to take into consideration global and transnational positionings of these citizenships.

Gender, race and ethnicity have been important factors of analysis for understanding the nation and colonialism – both of which are important contexts for race and ethnic identities. Gender and sexuality are also integral to the construction of racial and ethnic identities, which inevitably affect the movements that form around these identities (see Wade 1997). According to McClintock, nationalism is "constituted from the very beginning as a gendered discourse, and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power" (McClintock 1993). Constructions of nationhood usually involve

specific notions of both “manhood” and “womanhood” (Yuval-Davis 1997). Nationalist discourses and practices call on women and men in different ways. Women are seen as reproducers of biological and cultural offspring for the nation, as symbols of national boundaries and national identities, as participants in national struggles, and as workers in the national labor market (Yuval-Davis & Anthias 1992:115).

The Bolivian context

During the last decade, the question of Bolivia as a multicultural and pluri-ethnic nation-state has been an important issue within the national dialogue. In Bolivia the indigenous populations are not in the minority numerically, but historically they lack influence in the national political arena, and if they are invited to participate it is only in matters that concern “minor” questions such as basic education and local politics. The Bolivian state has had experiences dealing with the aims of multiculturalism through the reform of municipalization and the bilingual and intercultural educational reform in 1994. Current debates about autonomy for the country’s different regions and the reworking of the constitution through the *Asamblea constituyente* will address multicultural issues.

Political conflicts between promoters of gender equality and promoters of ethnic rights have been found on different levels, at the level of government, between researchers, and between indigenous movements and government and/or development agents.

The policies and programs that were established in Bolivia in the 1990s expressed a new vision of political agency and citizenship. This was a multicultural, pluri-ethnic, and gender-sensitive vision that broke with the longstanding assimilationist paradigm and promised greater respect for the country’s cultural diversity (Paulson 2002). Gender equality is an overall policy question for the Bolivian government, it was an aspiration of the drafters of the Law of Popular Participation (municipalization reform), and it is a fundamental dimension of democracy. In practice, however, the reform of Popular Participation in 1994 put up obstacles as well as creating opportunities for increased public participation and leadership by Bolivian women. At the level of government a conflict arose between the national sub-secretariat responsible for ethnic affairs and the sub-secretariat for gender affairs. The conflict concerned priorities and methodology (see Booth 1997, Paulson & Calla 2000).

The aim of the Law of Popular Participation was to extend democratic rights, through a municipal reform, to formerly excluded groups such as women in general and indigenous groups in the rural areas. The law was written in such a way that it gave explicit legal recognition to the equal claims of men and women to political

participation. At the same time, it provided the first legal recognition of the territorial authority of a wide range of indigenous and popular organizations. These organizations, representing the whole population of a given rural community or urban neighborhood, could register and acquire *personería jurídica* – the ability to claim legal rights and enter into contracts. The authorities within the organizations, who had been chosen according to the corresponding “customs, practices and statutes,” were recognized as their representatives. These organizations represent whole communities but are by tradition led by men. By insisting that the representatives of the base-organizations were to be chosen solely according to the “customs and practices” of the community, the Law could be said to confirm traditional norms that marginalize women from public roles. In addition, the existing women’s organizations (mothers’ clubs, artisans’ cooperatives, women’s sections within union federations, etc.) were disqualified from being recognized as base-organizations on the grounds that they have a functional rather than territorial base, and restricted membership. In other words, there was an inherent structural contradiction in the Law: it recognized women’s equal rights to political participation, but by acknowledging “customs and practices,” it worked against rather than in favor of a change toward more equal gender relations. This contradiction arose because, due to the variety of political cultures in Bolivia, it was important from the perspective of the designers of the Law to find a way to extend citizenship rights that were not based only on the occidental representative kind of democracy (see Booth 1997).

The conflict was real and generated some tension at the time between the national sub-secretariat responsible for ethnic affairs and the sub-secretariat for gender affairs. In this case, the promoters of gender equality lost the battle, and the question of culture and ethnicity was prioritized before women’s rights. The experiences from the implementation of the “Law of Popular Participation” show the difficulties that may arise when support for ethnic rights sees indigenous cultures as unchanging and unchallengeable as well as when the promotion of gender equality does not take the culturally dominated people and their social realities as a point of departure. Partly in response to the difficulties of the Law of Popular Participation, affirmative action was taken in relation to gender, and the Party Law of 1997 and the Communal Law of 2001 both established a 30% quota for women. In 2004, in line with multicultural policies, the Law for Participation of Civic Groups and Indigenous Peoples was established for the communal elections and included a quota of 50% for women. Some groups expected multicultural measures in relation to the 2006 Law for Constituent Assembly, but those expectations were not met. A quota of 33% was established for women.

Aurolyn Luykx (2000) has analyzed a related kind of problem in relation to Bolivia’s educational reform. She reported that Bolivia’s educational reform faced a conflict

between two goals, *interculturalism* and gender equity, which tended to be polarized in educational debates by advocates on both sides. She argues that gender equity,

as narrowly conceived through the application of Western strategies in an attempt to remedy overt sexist discrimination, is absent from the world view of many indigenous groups, but is a priority for external funding agencies. In this context, preoccupation with gender is often perceived as an imposition of foreign values, while the concept of interculturalism tends to be limited to a non-critical respect for indigenous cultural values. (Ibid.:150)

However, when she analyzes the philosophical and political underpinnings of both interculturalism and gender equity in Bolivian educational policy and practice, she finds that, far from being incompatible, the two are tightly interdependent and difficult to pursue in isolation from one another (ibid.).

At the level of researchers, political conflicts between advocates of gender and of ethnicity have contributed to a polarization of these categories in the realm of scholarly research. Paulson (2002) offers glimpses of struggles to shape representations of gender and ethnicity played out during the mid-1990s in the department of Cochabamba. Seminar participants construed the gender-sensitive approach and the ethnic-sensitive approach as methodological opposites and ideological enemies. The gender-sensitive approach was represented by Dutch and Bolivian researchers applying what Paulson calls “classic gender analysis.” The ethnic-sensitive approach was represented by a group of scholars who identified themselves as Andeanists. Yet both groups coincided in associating ethnicity with tradition and placing the idea of gender with modernity (ibid.:138-140).

Gender	Ethnicity
Individual	Collective “the woman does not exist as an individual”
Disaggregated statistics	Parts from the couple
Nuclear family	Extended networks of kinship (ayllu)
Modern	Traditional

(Paulson & Calla 2000)

At the level of grassroots organization and indigenous movements, as illustrated by Luykx above, the politics of gender equality have often been interpreted as a Western idea imposed from above, and there are several instances of groups dedicating

considerable amounts of time to trying to prove how irrelevant the gender-related concepts are for the context in which they evolve. In 2005 I talked to representatives of Swedish NGOs in La Paz who told me that it was difficult to implement the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's gender policy with grassroots organizations because, as they said: "Leaders of indigenous organizations claim that they don't need any gender equality plans because their worldview based on *pachamama* and *chachawarmi* reflects complementarity between women and men." "Gender equality is a Western idea." On March 8, 2006 the country's president, Evo Morales, expressed an essentialized view of "the woman" being first and foremost a mother symbolizing values such as care and honesty working for the unity of the family. According to the press he also said that "within Aymara culture there is no machismo, but yes a male leadership."

For women with an indigenous background there is a dilemma present in this context. As Pilar Alberti Manzanares said at the conference of REEA (Red Europea de Estudios Amerindios) in Göteborg, Sweden, in 2005, "It is revolutionary to fight against the state, but it is seen as divisive to fight against male dominance." The discourses of indigenous female politicians generally show loyalty to the "Indian cause," as in statements such as "Our goal is not to work against our men and the unified struggle" (Sabina Choquetijlla, presidenta de la Confederación de Bartolina Sisa 1991), "Chachawarmi imbues all our activities" (female leader), "We want to work for a better society for everybody, not only for the women" (female Quechua leader 2005), "Within MAS we have no discrimination" (Isabel Ortega, parliamentarian for MAS 2006). These discourses may or may not, of course, reflect actual practices among these female leaders.

There are several reasons why this conflict and polarization has evolved. It is based in a historical process with a hierarchization of social strata and the concentration of political power in the elite, an elite identifying with European and North American values and lifestyles. This has shown itself in relation to the women's movement in Bolivia as well. Different groups of feminists have different levels of education and cultural experiences. Paulson (2002) indicates that this stratification has allowed a dominant national discourse which inscribes concerns about ethnicity on the bodies of indigenous-identified others. Groups of "marginalized" others have been the focus of gender and ethnic attention for both scholarly discourse and political programs. Policies and projects are usually designed to recognize and help poor people, indigenous people, women, etc. What is ironic in the Bolivian case is that these so-called marginal groups constitute the vast majority of the national population. A dominant national discourse has been created that establishes ethnicity with "the others," "the Indians," "the marginalized," an image of passive women with indigenous background. In keeping with dominant global discourses, Bolivian

newspapers and television announce and repeat key markers of otherness that construe Bolivian majority groups as inferior marginals (ibid.).

Researchers have studied the transnational making of representations of gender, ethnicity and culture (e.g. Mato 2004). International contacts and transnational advocacy are very important for the development of indigenous political movements. Cultural representations are political tools. The way Bolivian indigenous women use and make representations of themselves and their movements in international contexts may well contribute to a global process of "othering" of indigenous women.

Concluding discussion

So, to what extent is the feminist project contradicted by the cultural project in the Bolivian context and what are the implications or possible risks in terms of gendered citizenships? In the historic polarization of gender versus ethnicity many representatives (women and men) of indigenous movements have tended to defend ethnic rights before gender equality. Gender issues have not been addressed forcefully by the indigenous women's movement and very little open debate has taken place within popular movements. With the government of Morales, who has a unique representativeness in the Bolivian context, in combination with multicultural measures, there is an apparent risk that feminist concerns will have to stand back for the cultural cause. Cultural attitudes favoring male leadership are in fact countered by strong legislation for female participation, but there have been many problems related to the application of the legislation, with the result that the quality of female participation has been poor.

The political conflicts that have emerged in the past have opened up for debate and greater gender awareness. Several male indigenous leaders are aware that they will have to prove what they mean by *chachawarmi* in practice. The question is whether the women will be able to place specific gender issues on the agenda. Without a united women's movement it will be difficult to enforce a vigorous gender debate on a national level.

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