"Indigenous and Feminist Movements at the Constituent Assembly in Bolivia: Locating the Representation of Indigenous Women"

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On January 25, 2009, Bolivians approved a new Constitution by a majority vote of 61.43% after a Constituent Assembly process that lasted from August 2006 to December 2007 followed by a year of tough negotiations and confrontations in Congress and in the streets.¹ While there is a long way between the adoption of a new Constitution and its implementation in state laws and policies, in Bolivia the reform process involved diverse social movements and political parties, among which the governing Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party. Because of the high level of participation and expectations coming from many spheres of society, this is a major turning point in Bolivian history.²

In this paper I look at this transformative process from the point of view of the intersection of gender and race/ethnicity. How did Bolivian women and indigenous peoples organize to influence the content of the new Constitution? How were “women’s interests” represented and how did ethnically-based organizations play a role in influencing the pattern of organizing and claim-making by women? In this endeavour, I

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² 90.26% of registered voters exercised their right to vote at the national referendum on the new Constitution, a massive participation rate that was unprecedented in Bolivia.
seek to understand the ways indigenous women have participated and whether the process enhanced their political agency or not. The general question this paper examines is what was indigenous women’s agenda, in relation to the mestiza-dominated feminist movement and within the male-dominated indigenous movement. As a social group experiencing racial, ethnic, class and gender domination, indigenous women had indeed a high stake in transforming the Constitution and seeing their voice heard in the ‘re-founding of the Bolivian State’. Were they able to do so and how? What allies could they count on?

In answering these questions, I will draw on the literature that discusses the meaning of autonomy for indigenous women and men, which is connected to a reflection on the social construction of feminism(s). My argument is that Bolivian indigenous women’s strong presence and activism allowed them to strengthen their voice throughout the Constituent Assembly process. Because of the central role of the indigenous movement in the Bolivian political process, the feminist movement had to include indigenous perspectives in the platform that it developed. In general terms, both the indigenous and the feminist movements were successful in influencing the content of the new Constitution. Many gender-specific claims have been put forward not only by the feminist movement in representation of “all” Bolivian women, but also by the indigenous movement representing specifically indigenous women.

The contribution of the indigenous and feminist movements at the Constituent Assembly produced a very progressive Constitution from the point of view of gender and
ethnicity and from the point of view of specific indigenous women’s claims. Moreover, the process led to an unforeseen consequence: indigenous women’s agency has strengthened through the formation of new organizations led by them in the wake of the adoption of the new Constitution. This is very significant in comparison with the case of Mexico where indigenous women’s participation in the negotiations prior to the 1996 San Andres Accords did not lead to the inclusion of many important gender-based claims in the Accords nor in the 2001 Law on Indigenous Rights and Culture (Stephen 2001: 63-64).

After presenting a theoretical framework on social movements and intersectionality and reviewing the literature on indigenous women’s movements in Latin America, I will briefly explain the Constituent Assembly process held in Bolivia, and then proceed to analyse the role of indigenous women’s organizations, the indigenous movement in general and the feminist movement. I will characterize their views on gender claims in relation to three principles (equality, equity, and complementarity) through an analysis of the public platforms they have defended and with the help of interviews I carried out in Bolivia in May 2007. Finally, I will conclude on how this political process has created more space for indigenous women’s collective action.

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3 A content analysis of the 2009 Constitution is beyond the scope of this paper. I focus on the process of constitutional reform rather than the actual result. The new Constitution can be found at: http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Bolivia/bolivia09.html

4 Field research was carried out in La Paz, Sucre and Cochabamba in May 2007. I interviewed women from popular organizations, feminist activists, academics,
1) An intersectional perspective on women’s movements

The paradigm of intersectionality emerged out of several strands of feminist work within standpoint theory and Black feminist thought, post-structuralism and post-colonialism. Briefly put, “intersectional analysis involves the concurrent analyses of multiple, intersecting sources of subordination/oppression, and is based on the premise that the impact of a particular source of subordination may vary, depending on its combination with other potential sources of subordination (or of relative privilege).” (Denis 2008, 677).

Intersectionality is grounded in the critique of essentialist forms of understanding social categories that marginalizes the experience of many groups within and across such categories like ‘women’, ‘workers’, ‘Afro-Brazilians’, etc. It also refuses the additive model of social complexity whereby one could analyse gender, ethnicity, class, or sexuality separately and then add them one on top of the other—with expressions like “triple oppression”. Instead, it considers that the particular intersections of these social categories, in specific historical contexts, produce social positions and identities that are idiosyncratic (Yuval-Davis 2006).

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international cooperation workers, and women’s NGOs workers. I also spent one week at the Constituent Assembly where I carried out a dozen of semi-structured interviews with women and men elected as Constituents, coming from a diversity of party affiliations and political backgrounds.

5 See McCall 2005 and Denis 2008 for good overviews.
An interesting question coming out of this perspective is the connection between multiple social positionings and the formation of group identities. Social categories are based on a set of constructed attributes that define who is entitled to what resources—tangible and intangible—and how authority over these resources is distributed, creating social hierarchies. Group identities, on the other hand, are produced historically by political, social and cultural processes that rely on how social categories are interpreted by social actors and used to generate identification between individuals, networks, and a variety of symbols (Brubaker 2004).

An intersectional analysis of social movements should distinguish between social positionings and group identities. The former does not automatically produce the latter, and group identities can include, explicitly or not, different categories of social positionings (Rousseau 2009). Thus, for example, the group identity of Aymaras includes various class-based and gender-based combinations of positioning, but the way the group expresses its identity may more or less refer to this diversity. The next question is: who or what produces/expresses the group identity? There are of course different ways to answer this question, but one of them is located in the field of social movement studies. It pertains to how collective action is structured around a set of shared meanings and mutual recognition, at least minimal organizations, and sustained contentious interaction with public authorities where claims for political inclusion are laid out (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001).

Social movements tend to essentialize collective identities and the social groups to which they relate for the sake of strategic legitimacy-building, sometimes with
contradictory effects (Stephen 2001). The feminist literature in particular has exposed the marginalization of some groups within feminist or women’s movements or the Afro-American civil rights movement for example (Breines 2002). But we still miss intersectional studies of social movement politics that would consider how intersecting categories such as gender, race, and ethnicity are represented in a social movement field.  

I propose to start filling this caveat by exploring through this case study how social positionings created by the intersection of a set of categories—here, gender and race/ethnicity—are articulated in the representation of group identities carried by social movement organizations. Social movements emerge out of specific political opportunities but also more fundamentally out of cultural processes of meaning construction derived from social relations and material conditions (Rubin 2004). Thus group identities as built

6 Crossley (2003, 62) defines a social movement field along Bourdieusian lines as: “a field in which different agents, networks and groups variously align, compete and conflict in pursuit of their goals; a field which generates its own exigencies, dynamics and rules, becoming a relatively autonomous ‘game’, but which is always only ever relatively autonomous”.

7 I follow Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) in their understanding racism as « a discourse and practice of inferiorizing ethnic groups” (p.12) based on racialisation as a historical process, and ethnicity as “partaking of the social conditions of a group, which is positioned in a particular way in terms of the social allocation of resources, within a context of difference to other groups, as well as commonalities and differences within [the group].”(p.9)
in social movements should be taken as reflecting power relations within society as much as between society and the State. Some social positionings are not represented strongly in a social movement field while some group identities are essentialized, thus obscuring more complex power relations and different experiences of oppression (Rousseau 2009).

From that perspective, it is interesting to examine the politics of women’s movements under the impact of indigenous movements in Latin America. In the last decade, following the rise of indigenous movements in many countries of the region, a new literature has started to document and analyse indigenous women’s organizing (among others: Hernández Castillo 1996 and 2003, Sierra 2001, Kampwirth 2002 and 2004, Richards 2004, Speed, Hernández Castillo and Stephen 2006, Oliart 2008). Based on a shared assumption that indigenous women are among the most exploited and least recognized as citizens in Latin American States—with high rates of illiteracy, maternal mortality, and suffering from racism, transnationals’ attacks on their livelihood, domestic and state violence, and exploitative labour-- most of the literature also emphasize the fact that neoliberal reforms and globalization have transformed gender relations in indigenous communities or urban neighbourhoods where they migrate. Moreover, decades of organizing promoted by the Church or development NGOs and by more autonomous peasant or indigenous organizations, have opened new opportunities for indigenous women to mobilize for change.

Because of the ethnic community-driven logic of indigenous movements, mobilized indigenous women support the collective projects of decolonization and political/cultural autonomy carried by their organizations while also criticizing
patriarchal practices and norms within their communities. As several authors have already explained, indigenous women are as likely as other women belonging to other ethnic groups or nationalist movements to be considered as the key agents for preserving and reproducing the community and what leaders identify as its culture (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Cadena 1991; Radcliffe 2008). This is both a source of empowerment and identity for women as well as a potential—and real—argument used against women’s full participation in all social spheres. One of the most immediate tensions revolves around the revaluing of customary law that is part of the project of indigenous cultural recognition and political autonomy. Customary practices do not always embody indigenous women’s rights or aspirations, thus their interest in participating in the (re)definition of what are to be considered indigenous norms (Sierra 2001 and 2007).

In Mexico, Hernández Castillo (1996 and 2003), Sierra (2001 and 2007), Kampwirth (2002 and 2004), and Speed, Hernández Castillo and Stephen (2006), among others, have shown how the Zapatista struggle has been a turning point for the consolidation of women’s spaces in male-dominated indigenous organizations and for the emergence of indigenous women’s own networks in several states of Mexico and at the national level with the Coordinadora nacional de mujeres indígenas de México (CNMIM). Indeed, one of their key demands is their inclusion in all political spaces and institutions at a par with men. Sierra’s work on indigenous justice mechanisms in the Sierra Norte de Puebla and in the State of Guerrero in Mexico has shown how indigenous women seek to combine some aspects of indigenous customary norms with notions of women’s rights drawn from national and international law (2008).
These processes are highly conflictual and reveal at least two intersecting levels whereby indigenous women are building their collective agency. First, at the level of the indigenous movement where indigenous women play a key role, the quest for indigenous autonomy implies at a general level the capacity for indigenous peoples to exercise self-determination: territorial rights, the right to govern themselves within these territories and the right to participate in all the decisions made at a broader governance level that affect their lives and rights. This includes the right to their self-defined institutions and norms. This broad struggle for autonomy contextualizes the way indigenous women define their social positioning and their gender identity. Their perspective is in line with indigenous cosmovisions that present a strong alternative to modernization theory and individualism.

As a transnational movement in the making, indigenous women have put forward a “notion of equality [that] identifies complementarity between genders as well as between human beings and nature” (Hernández Castillo 2010: 540). In the memoirs of the First Summit of Indigenous Women in the Americas in 2003, this movement claims as one of its core principles: “Duality or dualism: in which the feminine and the masculine in a same deity are two energy forces found in one (…). By considering the Supreme as dual, father and mother, one can act with gender equity. This attitude is basic for the eradication of machismo” (quoted in and translated by Hernández Castillo 2010: 540). As alluded to above, indigenous women face a long process of negotiating within indigenous movement organizations for the recognition of the changes needed in order for this gendered ideal to materialize in daily life, drawing as much on the interpretation
of customary practices and norms as on national and international women’s and indigenous rights (Richards 2005; Oliart 2008; Sierra 2008; Radcliffe 2008).

This way of defining gender and its politics has led some feminist and non-feminist mestizo actors to attack indigenous (women’s) movements as essentialist and conservative, while indigenous women articulate strong critiques of feminist movements for their ethnocentrism and racist reproduction of unequal social relations on the terrain of social movements (Hernández Castillo 2003). However, several authors also show that some mestiza women’s organizations have been key allies in the development of the indigenous women’s movement, even if their collaboration is at times tense and unequal (Speed, Hernández Castillo and Stephen 2006). The second level whereby indigenous women develop their collective agency is therefore in relation to women’s movements and feminist movements in particular. In this case, though, indigenous women are generally building relations from “outside” the feminist movement.

Mexican leader Martha Sánchez Nestor (2005) says that while some indigenous women like herself define themselves as a feminist, feminism is still largely associated to mestiza, middle class movements in the minds of the majority of indigenous women. Some deep disagreements over the sources of inequality and oppression, as well as on the definition of gender, are at stake, but this is also due to the power exercised by some feminist organizations and individuals to control or delegitimize indigenous women’s struggles (Richards 2004). Mexican anthropologist and women’s rights activist Hernández Castillo (2010) claims that while it may be too early to talk about indigenous feminism, the challenge brought forward by indigenous women is that of a critique of
capitalist individualism, neo-colonialism, and neoliberalism, together with a critique of sexism and racism. Indigenous women’s movements thus contribute to debates within and across feminist and other women’s movements by proposing a new form of radicalism.

All the literature reports the difficult path involved in building the representation of indigenous women’s gender interests. The Bolivian Constituent Assembly process created a terrain for social movement interaction where the strength of the indigenous movement in national politics, relying on Bolivia’s indigenous majority and its central role in the governing MAS, had a strong potential to influence the outcome. In Bolivia, the feminist movement is relatively small in comparison with some of its neighbouring countries. How did this impact on indigenous women’s mobilizing and voices?

2) The Constituent Assembly process in Bolivia

The Confederación de pueblos indígenas de Bolivia (CIDOB), representing 34 out of 36 indigenous peoples, marched through the country in 1990 to demand territorial rights and was the first to formulate the proposal of holding a Constituent Assembly. This became a central piece of the national agenda in the early 2000s when the political regime had become highly illegitimate in the eyes of many organized sectors. The flight of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in 2003 and the rise of Evo Morales as new political leader precipitated the demand for a complete institutional renewal.

Evo Morales was elected President with over 54% of the vote at the end of 2005, and upon assuming power in early 2006 announced plans for the election of a Constituent
Assembly during that year. Even though Evo Morales has wanted to project an image of a women-friendly leader and supporter of indigenous autonomy, the setting-up of the Constituent Assembly was marked by the government’s decision to retain the central role of political parties in the process. Instead of an Assembly were women would have 50% of the seats and indigenous peoples would be represented directly, as had been proposed by several civil society actors, the MAS government decided that Constituents would be elected through party lists with gender alternation (“alternancia” in Spanish) in the lists. Because in fact women were rarely positioned on top of the lists, this led to women occupying eighty-eight seats out of 255 (33%), far from the goal of gender parity defended by women’s and indigenous organizations. The MAS nonetheless ended up being the party that included the most women elected: sixty-four women, or 46.72% of

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8 During the Primer Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres para la Asamblea Constituyente, held on Oct. 28-29, 2004 in La Paz, where civil society women’s organizations met, a Gender Parity Law Project was prepared and submitted to public debate. Reported in Arnold and Spedding 2005, 129. This Law Project sought to ensure that women would hold 50% of the seats at the Assembly.

9 “Gender alternation” means that the electoral lists have to be made in a sequencing of one male and one female candidates following each other.
the MAS’ seats. In comparison, the second most voted party, right-wing PODEMOS, fared poorly, with sixteen women elected accounting for 26.67% of its seats.\(^\text{10}\)

The MAS obtained the majority of seats at the Assembly but not the absolute majority, which meant it had to negotiate. Political parties dominated the Assembly but with a strong check from civil society notably through the formation of a unity pact, the *Pacto de Unidad*, between all indigenous organizations that sought to lobby as a unitary voice, and through the initiative *Mujeres Presentes en la Historia* led by a coalition of feminist/women’s organizations.

The election of Constituents through party lists was not the last obstacle put in the way of women’s participation. In January 2007, the first *Encuentro nacional de mujeres constituyentes y parlamentarias* was held under the presidency of Silvia Lazarte, a prominent peasant leader who had been chosen by President Morales to be President of the Constituent Assembly. Elected women who gathered together at this meeting agreed on the creation of a *Coordinadora de Unidad de Mujeres Constituyentes de Bolivia* including all female political party representatives elected at the Assembly, for the purpose of producing a joint platform on women’s rights.\(^\text{11}\) When I interviewed Constituents in May 2007, all reported that the MAS had impeded the functioning of this Coordinadora because the party leadership wanted to retain control over it. But an


informal coalition of about twenty women Constituents coordinated the lobby work in the Assembly’s Commissions.

3) Indigenous women and feminism

Different types of actors have represented women’s gender interests in civil society and inside the Constituent Assembly. The women’s movement in Bolivia has historically been divided by ethnic and class factors, with indigenous and popular sector women having a long history of several decades of organizing street protests, hunger strikes and barricades to defend their living conditions, labour and land rights. Indigenous women from peasant and mining worker communities have led important political mobilizations such as the hunger strike against Dictator Hugo Bánzer in 1978 and the Water and Gas Wars that led to President Sánchez de Lozada’s flight in 2003. For that reason they have gained recognition from their male comrades and a reputation for being very combative. President Evo Morales recognized this when he appointed Silvia Lazarte as President of the Constituent Assembly.

Some middle class mestiza women have formed self-defined feminist collectives or NGOs mostly since the 1980s to promote women’s liberation, women’s human rights, gender-sensitive policy making, and the integration of women in politics and development. Feminists developed some relationships with popular, indigenous women but mainly through NGO-provided services or as objects of study for the production of data on women for public-policy making (Monasterios 2007). During most of the 1980s and 1990s, ethnic differences between women were generally not acknowledged as a
political challenge. Feminist NGOs in particular resorted to strategies based on spreading an institutionalized culture of women’s rights. They made important inroads in the 1990s with the creation of a women’s state machinery responsible for gender policy mainstreaming as well as gender electoral quotas.

As Monasterios (2007) highlights, the rise to power of indigenous movements with the election of Evo Morales, is signalling a new era that affects the dynamics of the women’s movement. The ‘hour of indigenous women’ seems to have arrived, and the time where the feminist movement sought to represent all Bolivian women would have to end, according to the author. Open conflicts between different sectors of organized women were to be expected from this new power balance. The Constituent Assembly was installed in that context. About 45% of the female Constituent-members could be described as indigenous, a fact that is in itself a historical precedent in the political history of Bolivia.\(^\text{12}\) The Assembly was the first institutional space where indigenous women were included on a formally equal footing with non-indigenous women and men.

\(^\text{12}\) This is my approximation based on the interviews with eighty-four of the eighty-eight women Constituents reproduced in the publication *Mujeres constituyentes*, op.cit.. Although ethnic identification was not always explicitly stated by the interviewees, a number of characteristics such as membership in social organizations, occupation, social background, and political ideas concerning indigenous claims, can be used to infer ethnic identification, bearing in mind that in the 2001 national census, 62% of Bolivian citizens self-identified as belonging to an indigenous people. If anything, this approximation
When I interviewed them, some indigenous female Constituents criticized feminist NGOs openly. They accused them of receiving wealth of money flowing from foreign sources, of defending an ideology that pitted women against men rather than recognizing each gender’s contribution to society, and reported feeling used by feminist NGOs as clientele.\textsuperscript{13} Beyond the ideological discrepancies, the inequality described by indigenous women activists is based on the fact that they are carrying out their political work as voluntary whereas NGO workers are generally receiving a salary and the resources needed to work with professional standards. Yet upon my questioning how they felt towards the platform elaborated by \textit{Mujeres Presentes en la Historia}, all the indigenous women interviewees replied that they generally agreed with it. When I asked them how it could be so, in light of their tensed relationship with feminists, they replied that the latter had held a long consultative process throughout the country, and as a result had involved women from all sectors of society in building this platform. Thus, the platform was deemed representative and inclusive.

On the other side of the spectrum, in interviews I carried out during the same period, some professional women identifying with the feminist movement expressed

\textsuperscript{13} It should be clarified that the critique of NGOs’ instrumental relationship with “projects’ target populations” is a common feature of critiques coming from popular sectors throughout Latin America, and about non-feminist NGOs as well.
feeling unjustly criticized and fearing that the work done in the 1990s and early 2000s to engender the State and public policies might be lost with the rise of indigenous power.\textsuperscript{14}

The interaction between indigenous women and feminist activists was thus set in a historical context filled with some frustration, mistrust and changing power dynamics. I proceed in the next sections to analyze in greater details the main actors involved in the indigenous and feminist movements, focussing on how the platforms that they launched during the constitutional reform process represented women’s gender interests.\textsuperscript{15} One of the key questions guiding my analysis of the platforms is whether indigenous norms of gender complementarity had a central place in indigenous women’s claims. I was also

\textsuperscript{14} This fear was at least in part based on President Morales’ decision to abolish the Vice-Ministry on Gender in 2006, a decision that was reversed only after some lobby work by the women’s movement. The new Vice-Ministry on Gender was housed in the Ministry of Justice rather than the Ministry of Social Development as it had been prior to Morales assuming power. This was widely perceived as a severe downgrading by all feminist interviewees.

\textsuperscript{15} My method is formal: I use written, official platforms produced before and during the Constituent Assembly, to compare and trace the process followed by the various actors. My goal is to assess whether there were central differences and/or shared ways of representing women’s gender-interests.
interested in analyzing if/how gender equality appeared in indigenous women’s and feminist movements’ agendas, as well as gender equity.¹⁶

Complementarity, as much as equality, is an ideal that can shape gender relations in very different ways. It can mean the representation of gender duality in all social spheres or the gendered separation of social spheres. Both options can lead to a gender hierarchy or not (Arnold and Spedding 2005, 157-161; Canessa 2005). In a publication presenting interviews with 84 out of 88 female Constituent members, where the question “what does ‘gender’ mean to you?” was asked, 24% answered by referring to equality, equity and/or non-discrimination, while 20% referred to their own experience as woman, 18% talked about political participation, and 10% referred to the indigenous principle of complementarity (Viceministerio de género and GTZ 2007, 5). When reading the content of individual interviews, it appears that there is a wide variety of opinions.

For example, Esperanza Rosario Huanca Mendoza, who was a traditional aymara authority in the Suyu Charcas Qhara-Qhara, refers to aymara’s notion of gender duality and claims that gender equity means participating equally, men and women, in all social spheres. She declares that “Las mujeres fallamos desde nuestra casa. A veces siempre estamos delegando las tareas a las mujercitas, que ellas tienen que cocinar y hacer las labores del hogar y no comparte ese rol con su hermano. La equidad de género tiene que

partir desde el hogar.” (Viceministerio de género and GTZ 2007, 15). Antonieta Meneses Rodríguez, who defines herself as a quechua nurse and who was active in the Guerra del Agua in Cochabamba, thinks that “…desde la Colonia las mujeres hemos sido excluidas totalmente. En los años de Mama Ocllo y de Manco Kapac se trabajaba en forma coordinada (…) El trabajo y el manejo económico eran mutuos y no había esa discriminación.” (Viceministerio de género and GTZ 2007, 15). This belief in a pre-colonial gender justice is present in several interviews. Others like Virginia Mamani Condorena, a coca leaf producer union leader, criticize abusive practices on the part of male comrades in social struggles. “Hay ese machismo en las federaciones. Cuando hacíamos esos bloqueos nos buscaban, pero cuando venían los ministros y viceminstros a acordar con ellos, nosotras estábamos desaparecidas y no nos convocaban. Y eso no es justo.”(Viceministerio de género and GTZ 2007, 19). Marcela Choque, craftswoman, claims that “la equidad de género es el igual tratamiento del hombre y de la mujer. Discrepo que sigamos como antes, donde las mujeres éramos vistas como inútiles e ignorantes.”(Viceministerio de género and GTZ 2007, 21). Such a diversity of views precludes any rapid assumption about how indigenous women may consider the meaning of complementarity in relation to the principles of equality and equity.

4) Indigenous women’s organizations:

Indigenous women are fully integrated within the indigenous movement, which is composed of three main organizations: the Confederación de pueblos indígenas de Bolivia (CIDOB), founded in 1982, representing 34 peoples of Bolivia (all but Aymaras
and Quechus) living in the Eastern Lowlands; the Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ), founded in 1997, representing Aymaras y Quechus living in the Highlands; and the Confederación Sindical Unida de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB), who was formed as a peasant union in the early 1980s and with increasingly visible ethnic claims in the last decade and a half. All major indigenous organizations prior to the election of the Constituent Assembly were mixed-gender organizations, with leadership being dominated by men. The Federación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas de Bolivia Bartolina Sisa - FNMCB BS\(^{17}\) (popularly called the “Bartolinas”) is an exception as a women-only organization created in the early 1980s as a branch of the Confederación Sindical Unida de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia – CSUTCB. Some leaders of the Bartolinas have attempted to create a more independent organization in the 1990s, but it was a short lived and controversial initiative and the FNMCB BS remain connected to the CSUTCB in organizational, political and financial terms (Salazar 1998; García Linera et al. 2004).

The Bartolinas have formed on the basis of a core principle of indigenous social structure and community organization, that of gender complementarity. As explained by Aymara anthropologist María Ángela Riveros Pinto, in Aymara communities the chachawarmi is a socio-economic and moral unit that accomplishes the basic social

\(^{17}\) At its 11th Congress in April 2006 the FNMCB BS decided to recognize afro-Bolivian women as members of its organization, and changed its name for Federación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas, Indígenas, Originarias y Afrodescendientes de Bolivia Bartolina Sisa.
functions in a household and at the community level. The chachawarmi is made up of the union of man and woman. Before entering into such a union, man and woman are not considered fully adult or full beings in their community (Riveros Pinto 2003, 17). The notion of individual equality is historically foreign to indigenous cultures that are grounded in community based principles of justice and harmony. However, one should consider that there are various degrees of recognition of the notion of individual equality within indigenous communities, as manifested through the use of the concepts of citizenship and human rights, for example (Canessa 2005; Rivera Cusicanqui 2010).

If chachawarmi is based on the complementarity of man and woman, in today’s indigenous communities like everywhere else in Bolivia there exists a high discrepancy between discourse on gender relations and daily practices. Gender relations have been profoundly transformed through colonialism, capitalist development, and lately, neoliberal reform and globalization, an important topic that goes beyond the scope of this paper (see Stephenson 1999; Rivera Cusicanqui 1996; Riveros Pinto 2003; Canessa 2005). The impact of increasing migration patterns among males and females, in the context of a rising rate of urbanization, is especially important in accounting for current disjuncture between indigenous gender ideals and practices (Canessa 2005; Rivera Cusicanqui 2010).

As stated by some of its members, the Bartolinas were created to ‘accompany’ men in their struggles for land, democracy and autonomy, echoing the much earlier struggle of leader Tupak Katari and his wife Bartolina Sisa in indigenous rebellions of the

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18 For Quechua culture the equivalent of chachawarmi is qhari-warmi.
late 18th century (Salazar 1998, 16). The Bartolinas were created from above and then worked hard to establish the organization at the grassroots in a pyramidal structure going from the national level to departmental units and then regional and local unions. As of 2004, the Bartolinas still had not laid down solid roots in 4 out of 9 departments according to some analysts (García-Linera et al. 2004).

The Bartolinas’ initial gender-specific demands revolved around condemning violence against women and claiming women’s sharing decision-making power in the union organization. Many peasant women are illiterate and without land titles, two issues that are often used to exclude them from union politics (Salazar 1998, 37). Moreover, peasant women are in charge of household management and child care, which makes it quite a challenge for them to develop leadership positions at levels above the local (Salazar 1998, 46).

Early on, the Bartolinas positioned themselves explicitly as not feminist, seeing feminism as a conflict against men (Salazar 1998, 55). This position was reaffirmed in some of the interviews I carried out in 2007 with Aymara and Quechua women elected at the Constituent Assembly, some of them who belonged to the Bartolinas.19 This being said, even a cursory look at the politics and discourse of indigenous peasant women reveals that the ideal of gender complementarity is not to be confused with Western notions of the separation of public and private spheres with corresponding gender roles. For indigenous women, maternity and household work are not to be opposed to active citizenship, meaning that it can be reconciled—at least in principle-- with political

19 Interviews carried out in Sucre, Bolivia, May 2007.
participation and leadership, equal access to education, and carrying out productive income-generating activities. Complementarity thus would not mean the construction of exclusive spheres corresponding to each gender, but rather that the duality of gender should be represented in all the spheres, sometimes with different tasks performed according to one’s gender.\textsuperscript{20}

This is manifest in the documents presenting the Bartolinas’ constitutional proposal, where many gender-specific claims are grounded in the notion of gender equity. The central claims were focussed on political participation, land rights, education and domestic violence: the Bartolinas demanded 50\% female representation in Congress, in parties and policy-making bodies; women’s equal right to land titling and redistribution, and women’s right to participate in land regulatory bodies. They also claimed the right to free public education; sanctions for violent spouses and the creation of women’s shelters. It is worth mentioning that the Bartolinas took a clear stance against abortion.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} Canessa’s ethnographic work emphasizes that Aymaras’ understanding of gender is performative rather than essentialist: gender is differentiated according to what men and women do rather than what they are. In Canessa 2005.

\textsuperscript{21} These constitutional reform claims come from different documents produced in 2006 by the FNMCB BS: Commission reports from the 11th Congress of the FNMCB BS, April 8-10, 2006; and Federación nacional de mujeres campesinas Bartolina Sisa, Propuestas para la Asamblea Constituyente. Available online at: http://www.mujeresconstituyentes.ctic.bo/archivos/biblioteca/propuesta_en_construccion_federacion_nacional_de_mujeres_campesinas_bartolina_sisa.pdf
Other important gender-specific claims related to family care, livelihood and health emphasized the right to water as a human right; right to food sovereignty and security; the promotion of traditional medicine and midwives, and equal access to healthcare services including guarantees against abuses committed by healthcare professionals. Some documents proposed the end of compulsory military service.\textsuperscript{22}

Other documents presenting indigenous women’s proposals are also worth mentioning. Women from CIDOB (Lowland peoples) produced a statement that presented a different set of gender-specific claims among which women’s right to choose the number of children they want to have and their right to use contraceptives.\textsuperscript{23} Another organization representing indigenous women but outside the frame of ethnic movements is the domestic workers movement through the Federación nacional de trabajadoras del hogar de Bolivia (FENATRAHOB), founded in 1993. It now includes domestic workers from all Bolivia’s departments and has acted as a union to represent these workers’

\textsuperscript{22} According to Canessa, military service is one of the key institutions that allow rural, indigenous men to become citizens by learning Spanish and earning their first official i.d., while indigenous women usually stay in the village. Military service is also associated with men’s access to pornography and prostitution. In Canessa 2005.

\textsuperscript{23} Pueblos indígenas Ayoreo, Chiquitano, Guarayo, Yuracaré/Mojeño. \textit{Propuesta de las mujeres indígenas de Santa Cruz sobre sus derechos y deberes para la nueva Constitución política del Estado}. Available online at:

\url{http://www.mujeresconstituyentes.c tic.bo/archivos/biblioteca/propuesta_de_las_mujeres_indigenas_de_santa_cruz.pdf} (Last visit April 15, 2009).
The adoption of the Ley de la Trabajadora del Hogar in 2003 is its major accomplishment. The Federation produced a constitutional platform in July 2006 where it pursued the agenda of domestic workers’ rights, shared all the claims of the Bartolinas except on the question of military service where it proposed women’s inclusion in it, and insisted on what it called the ‘democratization of domestic work’ (FENATRAHOB 2006).

5) Indigenous mixed-gender organizations

I now move to discuss documents emerging out of mixed-gender indigenous organizations. This is important in light of the fact that indigenous women are very active in these. While in the abstract we can speak of a single indigenous movement in Bolivia, as mentioned above it is made up of several organizations. In the context of the Constituent Assembly, all the major organizations including the Bartolinas have chosen to present a united front under the Pacto de Unidad. The platforms produced by this pact were the result of intense negotiations.

The Pacto de Unidad presented a first document outlining its constitutional reform platform in August 2006. It contained important gender components such as: 50% of cabinet ministers would have to be chosen by the President from a list presented by

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24 There are many aspects of these platforms that could be emphasized here but for the sake of precision I mention only what I consider the most specific elements in terms of gender, bearing in mind that broader indigenous claims also have very important consequences for gender relations transformation.
social organizations, of which half would be women; gender *alternancia* in electoral lists at the Legislature (not to be confused with gender parity); gender equity in land distribution (thus not a very strong demand compared to equal land rights); gender equity in labour training and labour protection; breastfeeding leave insurance; prohibition of all forms of violence, prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex; right to integral health. The document states explicitly that male and female Bolivians have the right to be elected and vote; that they have equal rights including special measures to guarantee women’s personal integrity, health and safe maternity, political, social and economic participation, access to land, work justly remunerated with social insurance and labour protection.²⁵ Some of these elements are therefore stronger than what appeared in the Bartolinas’ statements, while others are weaker.

A little less than a year after, in May 2007, the *Pacto de Unidad* launched a more developed Constitutional proposal which, interestingly, was written in a non-sexist language as introduced by *Mujeres Presentes en la Historia* earlier on, as will be explained below. It also included several articles close to the latter’s proposal: an article stating that the State shall adopt positive discrimination measures in favour of women and other disadvantaged sectors; the prohibition of discrimination was enhanced by including gender, sexual choice, and pregnancy among other motives specifically mentioned; sexual violence and exploitation within couples and families shall be

prohibited; sexual and reproductive rights were included; the right to gender equity, and equal gender rights to land titling and property; the new Legislature was to be formed by men and women according to the principles of parity and alternancia; right to free education with gender equity guaranteed for all men and women in equal conditions and opportunities, and supported by public policies geared towards guaranteeing girls’ schooling; equal conditions, opportunities and protection in the labour market, with the prohibition of labour discrimination against women—with protections for pregnant women, and with the right to equal pay for equal work (not to be confused with pay equity); universal health care insurance; promotion of paternal and maternal co-responsibility and recognition of equal rights to sons and daughters.\textsuperscript{26}

Complementarity was mentioned in the Pacto de Unidad’s 2006 and 2007 platforms as one of the fundamental principles that should guide the Bolivian State. But it was not associated explicitly with gender, contrary to the principle of equity that was frequently associated with gender. Overall, the Pacto de Unidad’s final position not only was stronger in many ways than the Bartolinas’ own documents, but also shared many of the claims voiced by MPH.

6) The feminist movement

The feminist movement in Bolivia is made up of at least two currents that I will call ‘radical-autonomous’ and ‘institutional’. The first, mainly formed by the collective

*Mujeres Creando*, based in La Paz, acted as a strong critique of the Constituent Assembly process and as a critique of the MAS government in general, denouncing what it saw as the instrumentalization of women by Evo Morales’ government.\(^{27}\) *Mujeres Creando* is known for its strong critiques of patriarchal, neo-colonial, heteronormative and racist structures, and remains largely led by mestiza, urban middle class women. In Santa Cruz, *Colectivo Rebeldía* is another autonomous feminist collective that seemed remote from indigenous women’s politics when it expressed some fears in 2006 about how aymara organizations could be a potential threat to feminist proposals because of their insistence in the value of complementarity (Sanabria et al. 2006).

The institutional current is made up of several NGOs and coalitions of NGOs. While it may be to overstretch to consider all the organizations that formed the project “Mujeres y Asamblea Constituyente”, that later became “Mujeres Presentes en la Historia” (MPH), as feminist, I categorise them as such for the sake of contrasting with indigenous, peasant and popular women’s organizations that have a very different historical relationship with the State and that, at the time of this research, did not generally define themselves as feminists.

The coalition that launched and sustained the MPH project was led by the *Coordenadora de la Mujer*, a network of development and women’s NGOs. The *Foro Político Nacional de Mujeres*, formed by some women from political parties, the *Articulación de Mujeres por la Equidad y la Igualdad (AMUPEI)*, a follow-up body to the Beijing Platform, and the *Plataforma de la Mujer* that represents women’s and

\(^{27}\) See their articles at: http://www.mujerescreando.org/
feminist organizations, were all members participating in the project (Lanza Monje 2008).

*Mujeres Presentes en la Historia* (MPH) started at the end of 2004 and organized over 400 workshops and meetings throughout the country, in the nine departments, in the city of El Alto and over 150 municipalities. According to MPH sources, about 20,000 women representing 1,000 women’s and mixed organizations were consulted and participated in elaborating a comprehensive constitutional proposal (MPH 2006; Lanza Monje 2008). MPH had the vantage point of orienting the consultation through the production of a set of educational material on the Constitution, launched in 2005.\(^{28}\)

MPH’s platform, produced at the end of the consultations in 2006 and on the basis of which its staff lobbied Constituent Assembly members, provided empirical data on gender inequalities and injustices. On that ground, it proposed several principles to be embodied in the new Constitution: equity and affirmative action; equality and non-discrimination; women’s specific rights in relation to sexual and reproductive rights and gender-based violence; democratization of non-remunerated domestic work and recognition of its economic value; equal pay for work of equal value (pay equity); constitutional recognition of international human rights treaties signed by the Bolivian

\(^{28}\) A *Guía pedagógica* and a series of thematic booklets (*The State and Rights; Human Rights; Social, Family, Cultural and Economic Regimes; Land, Territory and Natural Resources; Political Regime and Decentralization; History of the Constituent Assembly*) were disseminated throughout the country by the *Proyecto Mujeres y Asamblea Constituyente*.  

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State; gender parity and *alternancia* in elections and political institutions; women’s equal right to land ownership and inheritance; and the principle of a non-sexist language for the writing of the new Constitution (MPH 2006). It also argued for a secular State that recognizes religious freedom and for the recognition of indigenous collective rights over territory and to their traditional institutions.

MPH’s platform was thus informed by both gender equality and gender equity. Gender-specific rights were based on an explicit claim about “sexual difference as a universal fact that creates distinct biological and cultural needs for men and women” (MPH 2006). This definition of gender as anchored in biological differences is far from a radical feminist position, to say the least. However, nowhere in the platform is the notion of gender complementarity mentioned, reflecting the limits of the feminist movement’s recognition of indigenous women’s cultural frames.

Continuing onto how the MPH addressed indigenous norms and claims, the comparison of the educational material produced in 2005 with the proposal launched in 2006 after national consultations reveals important nuances. In the 2005 material, one reads that “indigenous customary norms are contrary to women’s legal equality”, a rather blunt statement that evokes ethnocentric prejudice. In general terms, though, the material recognized the legitimacy of indigenous peoples’ claims to territory and to their own

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29 In the former Constitution of Bolivia, article 3 specified that “the State recognizes and supports the Catholic Church”.

30 There are many other aspects of this platform that could be emphasized here but for the sake of precision I mention only the most relevant elements in terms of gender.
institutions. In contrast, the 2006 platform asked for the “elimination of all forms of
discrimination against women in customary norms dealing with access, property,
inheritance, selling and redistributing of land.” It also proposed that “the judiciary shall
articulate positive law with customary law in due respect of individual fundamental
rights”. MPH, led by a majority of middle class mestiza women, has thus moved to show
greater openness to the indigenous movement’s agenda, but remained cautious in terms
of how it perceived that women’s rights could be guaranteed under indigenous
institutions.

Another sector of the Bolivian feminist movement united under the Campaña 28
de septiembre—a Latin American regional campaign for the decriminalization of
abortion—produced a platform centered on sexual and reproductive rights, the
decriminalization of abortion, the right to be protected from all forms of violence, and the
recognition of different family forms.31 Most of these issues were also included in
MPH’s 2005 and 2006 documents, except for the very sensitive issue of abortion. Katia
Uriona, coordinator of MPH, argued instead for the inclusion of a general article on
sexual and reproductive rights and one on the right to life, saying that abortion should be

31Campana 28 de Septiembre-Bolivia, Desde nuestros cuerpos hacia la Asamblea
Constituyente. Propuestas feministas para una nueva Constitución política del Estado.
Available online at:
http://constituyentesoberana.org/3/propuestas/osio/22_Movimiento_Feminista_Campania
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treated in an ordinary law rather than in the Constitution.\textsuperscript{32} This was probably motivated by the fact that abortion was one of the most divisive issues between feminists and indigenous women’s organizations, with some of the latter openly opposing abortion. In fact, the \textit{Campaña 28 de Septiembre} itself strategically decided to focus on a minimalist agenda during the course of the Constituent process by dropping the issue of abortion when it was confronted to the need to ally with other sectors of the women’s movement to confront the progress made by Conservative groups within the Constituent Assembly’s Commission on Rights, Duties and Guarantees. During the time of my field work in Sucre, the latter was the site of a debate around the article guaranteeing the right to life, some Constituent-members including some from the MAS wanting to include “the right to life beginning at conception”. In a document produced after the end of the Assembly’s work, the Campaña recognized that this crisis had prompted it to seek compromise with broad sectors of the women’s movement. Faced with the crisis, it decided to focus on three points of its platform: the right to life set in general terms, recognition of diverse family forms, and a secular State.\textsuperscript{33}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{33} Campaña 28 de Septiembre. Desde el nuevo Texto Constitucional hacia nuestros cuerpos. Available online at: http://www.cladem.org/espanol/nacionales/bolivia/desde_el_nuevo_texto.pdf (last visit July 2, 2009).
\end{footnotesize}
6) Indigenous women’s mobilization after the Constituent Assembly process:

Indigenous women’s mobilization has shown increased strength during the last months of and following the Constituent Assembly process. First, the creation of the Confederación nacional de mujeres indígenas de Bolivia (CNAMIB), in November 2007, responded to lowland indigenous women’s willingness to build a stronger voice within the CIDOB. Founded at the very end of the Constituent Assembly’s work, the CNAMIB can be seen as a byproduct of the constitutional reform’s mobilization process. Moreover, a new national event where popular, indigenous women’s organizations jointly strategize was held twice, in 2008 and 2009. The Cumbre Social de Mujeres de Bolivia, led by the Bartolina, was made to create women’s synergies around the implementation of the new Constitution. It brought together the FENATRAHOB, the CIDOB-CNAMIB, women from the CONAMAQ as well as several other women’s organizations. Among the claims it put forward in its meeting resolutions in 2008 was demanding the creation of a Consejo Nacional de Mujeres Originarias Campesinas to resolve community/indigenous justice conflicts involving women’s rights.34

Finally, indigenous women from the lowlands and highlands held a joint Encuentro nacional de mujeres indígenas de tierras bajas y tierras altas de Bolivia on May 8-9, 2009, to prepare a joint platform to be brought to the First Continental Summit of Indigenous Women of Abya Yala, held in Puno, Peru, on May 27-28, 2009. These

34 Resoluciones de la Primera Cumbre Social de Mujeres de Bolivia, August 15, 2008.

(last visit July 3, 2009).
official meetings testify to a stronger protagonism on the part of indigenous women at a national scale, representing themselves directly and not only through mixed-gender organizations.

The collaborative stance between feminists and indigenous women has also continued in the wake of the Constituent Assembly. On March 29, 2008, the CNAMIB as well as the Domestic Workers Federation signed a joint statement together with numerous other women’s organizations, among which the Federación de Mujeres de la ciudad de El Alto—a city with a majority of indigenous inhabitants, and the Campaña 28 de Septiembre, to defend the draft Constitution and in particular women’s sexual and reproductive rights and the right to live without violence.\(^{35}\) Once the new Constitution was approved by Referendum in early 2009, there was a joint feminist-indigenous women’s work on the new transitional electoral law. The proposal developed by CNAMIB, CIDOB, CONAMAQ, FENATRAHOB, and the Coordinadora de la Mujer, among others, was supported by the Federación Bartolina Sisa. It sought to ensure that the gender parity and *alternancia* principles contained in the Constitution would be

reflected in the actual electoral law. These organizations were only partly successful in that only the gender *alternancia* principle was included in the law.  

**Conclusion**

Indigenous organizations united under the *Pacto de Unidad* showed an increasingly strong commitment to representing indigenous women’s gender specific rights. This was due to the fact that indigenous women, whether involved through the Bartolinas or mixed-gender organizations, had a strong influence on the *Pacto de Unidad*’s negotiations. Moreover, a great part of the explanation for the success of women’s gender-specific interest representation lies in the collaborative stance adopted by mobilized indigenous women and feminist organizations during the Constituent assembly. While there was no official women’s coalition bringing them together, the MPH provided a space for the formulation of a platform that was recognized by indigenous women as legitimate, even if feminists had not initially showed much openness to indigenous agendas and a climate of mistrust surrounded the negotiations.

This analysis of the indigenous and feminist movements’ dynamics around the Constituent Assembly process in Bolivia presents several findings for the study of indigenous women’s mobilization in the Americas. The first one is obviously related to

36 “Ley transitoria electoral: La acción coordinada de las mujeres por la paridad y la *alternancia*” at:

the strength of the indigenous movement in the national political process, as a key variable to consider in understanding both the important space occupied by indigenous women who are central to the indigenous movement, and the feminist movement’s willingness to include and negotiate with indigenous women. The broad context whereby the Constituent Assembly is a historic demand of the indigenous movement, and where the governing party, the MAS, is strongly connected to this movement, acted as a strong motive for the feminist movement to consider some of the indigenous women’s agenda. Indigenous Bolivian women managed to position themselves as a central collective actor in representation of Bolivian women.

One of the interesting outcomes of this political process is indigenous women’s increasing protagonism outside of mixed-gender organizations, starting at the end of the Constituent Assembly process. They seized the opportunity presented by the gains made during the negotiations to develop more autonomous forms of mobilization, while not breaking ranks with their male comrades. This is in line with the findings of the literature on other cases of indigenous women’s mobilization in other parts of Latin America, where their struggle inside the indigenous movement involves both unity and gender differentiation.

Finally, the findings reveal that equal rights and equity measures in the form of specific women’s rights or positive discrimination were much more central to all the indigenous and feminist organizations who lobbied Constituent assembly members, in comparison with the indigenous principle of complementarity. The latter remained important in a general fashion in indigenous platforms and in the 2009 Constitution,
rather than directly associated with gender. Now that Bolivia has one of the most progressive Constitutions of the world, it is only to be hoped that its political class will have the means and the will to implement it.

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