

8 Embodied plurinational identities in the urban highlands of Bolivia

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Constructions of nationhood usually involve specific notions of both “manhood” and “womanhood” (Yuval-Davis 1997). Nationalist projects try to create unity around certain ideals. During the nineteenth century, Latin American states worked to normalize elite, predominantly male, ideals of femininity and masculinity (Dore 2000). The turbulent social protests that shook Bolivia at the beginning of the twenty-first century started a process of restructuring the Bolivian state with the aim of creating a decolonized state, one more directed by social movements. This article explores the way national identities have been gendered and embodied in this process, focusing particularly on the ways plurinational ideals are embodied by Bolivia’s new leadership: women and men of indigenous background active within social movements. It starts with a historical review of some of the ways Bolivian nationalism was expressed in terms of gender, class, and race/ethnicity, and compares these notions with the ways national ideals are expressed today, referring mainly to what is sometimes called the “indigenous nationalism” of Bolivia’s current government and social movements.

Las construcciones de la nacionalidad muchas veces incluyen nociones específicas de tanto ‘virilidad’ como ‘feminidad’ (Yuval-Davis 1997). Los proyectos nacionalistas tratan de crear unidad alrededor de ciertos ideales. Durante el siglo diecinueve, los estados latinoamericanos trabajaron para normalizar los ideales de la élite, predominantemente masculina, acerca de la feminidad y la masculinidad. (Dore 2000). Con las protestas sociales que ocurrieron en Bolivia durante la primera década del siglo veintiuno empezó un proceso de reestructuración del estado boliviano con el fin de crear un estado descolonizado, y más dirigido por los movimientos sociales. Este artículo explora la manera en que las identidades nacionales han sido imbuidas de género e incorporadas por el nuevo liderazgo de Bolivia: hombres y mujeres de origen indígena, quienes activamente participan dentro de los movimientos sociales. Empieza con una reseña histórica de las diferentes maneras en que el nacionalismo boliviano ha sido expresado en términos de género, clase y etnicidad, y compara estas nociones con la manera en que los ideales nacionales son expresados hoy en día. Se refiere principalmente a lo llamado “nacionalismo indígena” del gobierno actual de Bolivia y los movimientos sociales.

Introduction

Yuval-Davis (1997) argues that constructions of nationhood usually involve specific notions of both “manhood” and “womanhood.” She promotes a gendered understanding of nations and nationalism and suggests a systematic analysis of the contribution of gender relations to crucial dimensions of nationalist projects that try to create unity around certain ideals. During the nineteenth century, Latin American states worked to normalize elite, predominantly male, ideals of femininity and masculinity (Dore 2000). The turbulent social protests that shook Bolivia at the beginning of the twenty-first century started a process of restructuring the Bolivian state with the aim of creating a decolonized state, one more directed by social movements. In this article I will explore the way national identities have been gendered and embodied in this process, focusing particularly on the ways plurinational ideals are embodied by Bolivia’s new leadership: women and men of indigenous background active within social movements. I start with a historical review of some of the ways Bolivian nationalism was expressed in terms of gender, class, and race/ethnicity, and compare these notions with the ways national ideals are expressed today (2005–present), referring mainly to what is sometimes called the “indigenous nationalism” of Bolivia’s government and social movements. I then outline some of the possibilities and limitations of the ways national identities are being gendered and embodied by these actors.¹ The article is based on anthropological research in the form of literary reviews, interviews, and observations during the period of 2006 to 2009.

Gendered embodied national identities

Following Yuval-Davis (1997), we may ask how we can understand the gendered embodiment of national identities and borders, and in what ways national identities have been embodied in the Andean area. These questions are related to the analysis of “the ways the relations between women and men affect and are affected by various nationalist projects and processes, as well as the ways notions of femininity and masculinity are constructed within nationalist discourses” (ibid.: 4). She suggests a systematic analysis of the importance of gender relations into crucial dimensions of nationalist projects such as national reproduction, national culture, and national citizenship (ibid.: 3). Yuval-Davis (1993) distinguishes between three dimensions of nationalist projects: constructions of nations based on notions of origin, culture, and citizenship in states. Different aspects of gender relations play an important role in each of these dimensions of nationalist projects.

The idea that the nation was to be created based on the idea of a common origin or shared blood/genes was hardly an option in the Bolivian case during the first two hundred years of the republic. In Bolivia nationalist projects have

responded, rather, to the idea of creating a shared culture and traditions as well as basing nationalism on citizenship in the state. In historical sources concerning relations between nation, state, and gender relations in Bolivia and Latin America, it is clear that gender relations were organized according to difference and hierarchy. The main problem seems to have been how to maintain differentiation between different categories of people, within the idea of a unified nation (Barragán 1997; Widmark 2010).

Nationalist projects in Bolivia, as elsewhere, tried to create unity around certain ideals. During the nineteenth century, as indicated by Dore (2000: 5), Latin American states worked to normalize elite, predominantly male, ideals of femininity and masculinity. This normalization provided the opportunity for national, regional, and local officials to exert pressure on men and women to conform to what the elite regarded as “proper” behavior. “Proper” was a highly fluid notion that varied by sex, class, race, marital status, age, and so on (*ibid.*).

By analyzing the legislation of the new republic of Bolivia, Barragán (1997) shows that juridical equality, the basis of modernity and political independence in Latin American countries, was not equal. With the exception of the rights of the male elite, the essential structure of the nation continued to be difference and hierarchy, a fact that was perceived as perfectly logical and consistent by the authors of the legislation (*ibid.*: PE58). A dilemma for the ruling elites, not least in Bolivia, was how to promote economic progress (through the formation of a rural labor force) and at the same time maintain distinctions based on race, class, and gender (Larson 2005: 38).

After the 1952 revolution the Bolivian state set out to create a national identity without ethnic distinctions. However, patterns of class differentiation and the reassertion of local identities undermined the construction of a unified national culture, and social, cultural, and economic distinctions between women remained, resulting in ambiguous images of femininity (Gill 1993: 72). By contrast, the policies and programs that were established in Bolivia in the 1990s expressed a new vision of political agency and citizenship. These programs reflected 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). In 1994, under the neoliberal government of Sanchez de Losada, Bolivia was recognized as a multicultural and multiethnic state. Since then, Bolivia has gone through a far-reaching process of social and political change, taking a serious turn in early 2000. Issues about cultural, ethnic, and indigenous identities are very much in focus since, in Albro’s words, “indigenous-based politics have lately gained national ground not through promoting ethno-nationalist separatism but by ceding the formerly exclusive category of ‘Indian’ to a pluralist and urban-

based project of refounding the Bolivian state” (Albro 2005: 433–34). The country’s new constitution, which was accepted by referendum in January 2009, declares Bolivia a plurinational state with a constitution that grants the Andean country’s thirty-six native peoples the right to self-determination, including collective title to their lands. Even though the politics of the MAS government of Evo Morales is quite pragmatic in nature, it is guided by a combination of socialism and indigenous-based politics. It is often referred to as “indigenous nationalism,” alluding to the fact that it is a nationalism hegemonized by the peasant movements (Monasterios 2007; Stefanoni and Do Alto 2007). Thus, the nationalist project has changed, with subsequent implications for the notions of femininity and masculinity.

Bodily metaphors and border guards

Bodily metaphors may be used to symbolize and delimit groups of people. Gender symbols play significant roles in maintaining and ideologically reproducing the unity of “imagined communities.” The unity of national “imagined communities” is a mythical unity that has to be maintained and ideologically reproduced, and this, according to Armstrong (1982 cit. in Yuval-Davis 1997: 23), requires a system of symbolic “border guards.” The task of these “border guards” is to identify people as members or non-members of the collectivity, and they are closely linked to specific cultural codes of style of dress and behavior as well as to more elaborate bodies of customs. A particularly significant role is played by gender symbols (ibid.: 23). The idea that the collectivity’s identity and future destiny is carried by women has also brought about “the construction of women as the bearers of the collectivity’s honour” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 45). Thus, women embody in their “proper” behavior and their “proper” clothing the boundaries of the collectivity. Radcliffe (1999) argues likewise that national identities in the Andean area are embodied “through racialized and gendered experiences of corporeality (corporeality referring to the bodily interface between material relations and self-identity)” (ibid.: 213).

In Bolivia, what has been considered “proper” behavior and clothing has been different for different groups of women. The ideal *señora* or “lady” of the beginning of the twentieth century had certain characteristics, such as submissiveness, religious devotion, and devotion to her family. Female virginity at marriage and chastity thereafter were highly valued and the sexuality of women was guarded by both women and men. The ladies of the Creole upper class followed a fashion style emanating from Europe. This group of women did not value hard work as an end in itself and they did not work outside the home (Gill 1993: 74). This could be contrasted to the urban Aymara-speaking women

of today, who may be valued within their own group for their capacity for hard work, who are expected to contribute to the economy of the household, and among whom wearing the traditional *pollera* (an outfit probably created in its current form by the *cholas paceñas* in the mid-twentieth century) is a sign of dignity (Widmark 2003). Female virginity at marriage is not emphasized among these groups, where young people are often allowed to have premarital relations and young couples often wait to marry until they already have several children and have accumulated enough social and economic capital to organize the wedding.

There are differences between different social groups with regard to the ways gender relations are structured and how hierarchical relations have been expressed in gendered ways that are typical of the twentieth century in Bolivia. Stephenson (1999) argues that the dominant ideology of womanhood played a key role in the struggle for hegemonic control by the urban *criollo* sectors. National discourses expressed support for a homogeneous cultural identity, based on certain representations of woman and the maternal body. Hierarchies were reconstructed on the prevailing ideology of womanhood, which expressed not only gender differences, but also economic and racial differences. The parameters that determined who were “women” and who were “not women” were thereby established, and thus only certain women were legitimated as women within the oligarchic state (1999: 9–13).

The way differences have been structured may be illustrated by Gill (1990), who studied domestic service and the actors involved and states that “prior to the 1952 national revolution, domestic service was a complex system that reflected the heterogeneity of La Paz society” (ibid.: 121). It was in homes of the *criollo* upper class that most household workers were found. The wealth of these families derived from large landholdings or mines, and the male members often worked in professions like law and medicine. The main tasks of the adult women of these households were to care for the family members and manage the home and the servants. In order for a woman to be considered a “lady” in the fullest sense, it was necessary to have servants in the home. These upper-class women did not engage in salaried employment outside the home if it could be avoided, because it was considered improper for women of their social standing. It was not only the members of the upper class who employed servants, however. Servants could also be found in the homes and businesses of, for instance, bakers, butchers, owners of small shops, and tailors; that is, families with considerably less social prestige and economic power, and with a sense of belonging to an urban Aymara culture. But the servants of these female employers were often used in both domestic and non-domestic tasks such as engaging in their employer’s small family business, selling goods in the markets,

or assisting in travels between the city and the surrounding altiplano to buy and sell goods (*ibid.*: 121).

Class relations separated upper-class employers from employees, who had very different situations and unequal duties and obligations. Mistresses and servants were divided by class divisions and ethnic differences, but both groups were affected by prevailing gender conventions, albeit in different ways. Most women answered ultimately to a male head of household, who had the power to intervene in domestic affairs and contradict the orders of the mistress. The legal system confirmed that he had final authority over servants. As Gill notes (1990: 123), the males of the household could behave toward the female domestic servants (including sexual abuse) in a way completely contrary to what was considered “proper” behavior within upper-class gender relations.

Bolivia went through important transformations of society following the 1952 national revolution and the agrarian reform the next year, which changed the relations between employers and servants. With the destruction of the hacienda system and the abolition of serfdom that followed from these events, the urban oligarchy lost many of its former privileges. Gill (1990) has demonstrated how class, gender, and ethnic relationships have structured the interactions between employer and servant and conditioned their involvement in the labor force. The way house workers have been treated varies over time and with the personalities and socioeconomic backgrounds of their employers. Transformations that led to a drastic decrease in multiservant households and the downward mobility of some employers generated changes for the household workers, but various enduring practices continued to shape the relationship between mistress and female servant.

Other important gendering institutions of the state in Bolivia after the revolution have been the military and the school. Gill (1997) explores in another study the role of military service in creating a positive sense of masculine identity among subaltern men that is simultaneously linked to their own subordination and reinforces other gendered patterns that degrade women and non-military men. Larson (2005) shows how politics of rural schooling (connected to the republic’s nation-building project in the early 1900s) was formulated to enter the “bodies, hearths and minds” of the rural population with the aim of transforming women and men into productive peasants. These reforms focused, among other things, on the Indian woman’s being the one to cultivate the new habits of hygiene, work, and consumption necessary for the nation to prosper. The role of schooling for cultural production has also been analyzed by Luykx (1999), showing the intersections of gender, race, and class that influence the formation of rural schoolteachers and their transformations into Bolivian citizens in the twentieth century. As we can see by looking at these examples, there have been certain dominant ideals pointing toward different

groups' expected roles and positions in the Bolivian nation, followed by notions of what is considered "proper" behavior for each category. Any social change will have to stand up to and question these – very entrenched – notions.

Plurinational ideals embodied by today's female leaders

Returning to the social and political processes of this century and the restructuring of the Bolivian state, it is interesting to explore how current social and political changes express themselves in relation to these issues. Since my research area has focused on political participation lately, I am wondering how cultural discourses (of today) produce gender differences within the political area. Are there particular ways in which plurinational ideals are embodied by Bolivia's new leadership: women and men of indigenous background active within social movements? Is "indigenous" nationalism expressed differently compared to the earlier nation-making of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?

What first comes to mind is a photo found on the internet of the "plurinational cabinet" of the Bolivian government in 2010. In the picture the new Bolivian government is lined up, and in the front row we find only women. We can see, due to their traditional dress (the hat, shawl, and skirt), that three of the women are of indigenous background, representing Tarija, Cochabamba, and La Paz. One of them is not dressed "de pollera" but signals her background through the braids, hat, and shawl. Most of the men wear a suit, and the women who are not of "indigenous" background wear trousers or a suit (jacket and skirt). The fact that the women are lined up in front might not be determined solely by the fact that they are shorter in height; creating a gender-balanced government has become more important to the Morales leadership. The female state secretaries of indigenous background are also strategically placed in front, for, as Monasterios (2007) notes, ever since the inauguration of Evo Morales's government it is indigenous women's groups (both rural and urban) that are perceived as the legitimate representatives of large majorities of women. In a visit to the Bolivian government's website in 2012, I look for parliamentarians, who are identified by name and a photograph in a list. There are a few men who signal indigenous background through their choice of head gear, but women are in the majority, wearing the typical braids and a hat. Even though the former hierarchy between different social groups is downplayed, one might say that difference is highlighted, and it is the women who have the role of upholding this difference through their dress.

Uniformity is striking among groups of people of indigenous background in Bolivia. Strong borders around the group are expressed through what clothes they wear, what they eat, how they dance, and so on. Women's dress is always an issue, but uniformity is not only for women; there are dress codes (less

visible) for men also. I have shown (Widmark 2003) that among urban Aymara speakers it was not only women who dressed in a uniform way; most men wore a certain kind of gabardine trousers, a waist-length leather jacket (in some cases, one of nylon), and a cap. Their hairstyle was also similar to that of other men of the same category; the hair was combed back and kept in place with the help of water or hair gel. In my research (*ibid.*) I showed that among these urban bilingual Aymara speakers there was a lot of social pressure to maintain borders around the community, something that was also expressed at meetings though explicit references to differences between themselves and representatives of other sectors of society.

With the uniformity in, for example, ways of dressing there is not much room for individual expressions, which is well in line with the communitarian and egalitarian ideals that are often emphasized in the Andean area. In relation to this, I want to point to a couple of additional photos on the internet representing official images of female leaders of indigenous background, women whom I know. One is a picture of Sabina Choquetijlla when she was a candidate for vice president in 2005. She chooses an image of herself, when she has just been given the post by her fellows and is being congratulated, with a wreath of leaves and “mixture” (confetti) in her hair, which might signal that she has been chosen according to traditional communitarian procedures with the aim of “servir a la comunidad” (serving the community), which is a common expression in the highlands. Andean communities have many egalitarian characteristics, but this does not mean that they lack hierarchies. I found another photograph, this one of Isabel Ortega – senator of Oruro and president of the Indigenous Organization of America. I knew her in the 1990s, when she was a base leader in the countryside outside Oruro. In the photo she wears a very costly traditional outfit, probably required by the occasion, but it also signals her position to her supporters, that is, the fact that she is now an influential politician and can afford such an expensive outfit.

The choice of traditional dress expresses a certain ethnic sense of belonging. Traditional outfits can be bought at many different prices and are generally quite expensive, but it may also signal a “humble” background in terms of class. In Bolivian society there is often a correlation between ethnicity and class; that is, indigenous peoples are often poor, and people of indigenous background are often associated with people of scarce resources, which is something a politician perhaps wants to emphasize in front of his/her followers. That is how Julia Ramos, parliamentarian representing Tarija, explains her choice of dress in an interview by Marta Cabezas in 2008. She wants to show that she leads a life and dresses like “ordinary” people, that is, the Bolivian majority.

In analyzing politicians' choice of dress we can also see how bodily expressions of ethnicity follow political conjunctures. In the plurinational state of Bolivia in 2010, a dress code that clarifies or emphasizes ethnic differences is expected by parliamentarians and members of government. Until recently this was not so, and I want to highlight a third picture portraying Teresa Canaviri, former vice minister of the government during the period of Carlos Mesa (2003–2005), who is wearing her hair in a pony tail and does not wear a traditional outfit. Maybe she does not identify with the countryside as much as the other two, but she is still of indigenous and social-movement background, having been one of the founders of one of the Aymara-based NGOs in El Alto. It is not a coincidence that she was vice minister in the government preceding the shift towards Evo Morales and the MAS movement. There is another interesting picture on the internet portraying Bolivia's vice minister Teresa Canaviri Sirpa and Ellen Inga O. Hætta, state secretary in the Norwegian government, when they met in Kautokeino in 2005. Ellen Haetta wears a traditional Sami dress, but Teresa Canaviri wears a pullover and trousers. These pictures show that claims of identity politics may be followed by the use of traditional dress as a way of expressing "authenticity," which is common among Sami leaders in the Nordic countries, but maybe not a viable strategy for Teresa Canaviri at that time.

Are women more Indian?

Several authors have claimed that in the Andes, women carry the notions of "Indianness" to a greater extent than men do (de la Cadena 1995; Radcliffe 2001; Canessa 2005). Radcliffe (1999) reports that men self-identify as mestizo to a higher degree, and more unambiguously, than women in a lower-middle-class neighborhood in Quito. Women are expected to be more "authentic" in their sense of belonging to the ethnic group or even nation. Is this still true in Bolivia, and what are the implications?

"Authenticity" is a debated phenomenon in relation to politics of ethnic identity, where it can become a political and economic resource as exemplified by the use of typical "indigenous" clothing, mentioned above. But it can also be the source of what Mercer (1990 cit. in Yuval-Davis 1997: 45) has called "the burden of representation" or "forced identities" (Chhachhi 1991 cit. in Yuval-Davis 1997: 45). It is typical that women are required to carry this "burden of representation," being constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honor (Yuval-Davis 1997: 45). In the Andes, women carry the notions of "Indianness" to a greater extent than men do. Zulawski (2000), in her analysis of the different ways two medical doctors confront the

“Indian problem,” that is, the issue of the integration of the native population into the new nation-state in the early twentieth century, points to this fact. One of the medical doctors working with indigenous miners viewed the problem of the “Indians” as one of culture (a common view at that time), while the other brought in the category of social class to explain the miners’ health problems. He perceived the miners as working class, by definition not “Indians,” and therefore not to blame for their diseases. But the women, whom he perceived as “Indians,” had customs that led to the spread of disease and death (ibid.: 122). While the view of one of the doctors focused on Andean culture as producing health problems for the public, the view of the other focused on the women as the main bearers of that culture (ibid.: 126). This way of thinking, although in very different contexts, resembles the reports of Radcliffe (2001: 161) that within indigenous movements of Peru women are positioned as the core of indigenous society and are expected to remain as guardians of indigenous culture, and of de la Cadena (1995), who argued from the highlands in Peru that women were seen as “more Indian” than the men from the same village, perceptions based on ideas of division of labor and qualities achieved through migration. The same tendency can be found in Bolivia, and Canessa (2005) even argues that indigenous men are also perceived as “more feminine” by association, because of the intersections of the gender and ethnic hierarchies.

As mentioned above, women often embody the borders of the collectivity in their “proper” way of dressing, which is partly illustrated above in reference to the dress codes of the indigenous politicians. When I did my anthropological fieldwork for my dissertation among a group of urban bilingual Aymara speakers, women were spoken of as being “de pollera” (wearing the traditional skirt) or “de vestido” (wearing occidental clothes). In general I found that there were very few differences in terms of cultural sense of belonging attached to choice of dress. Instead it concerned mostly practical and economic concerns, since being dressed “de pollera” was more expensive. Even so, there were meanings attached to the different dress codes that were activated on certain occasions, and in some contexts: to be “de pollera” seemed to imply a “proper” way of being, which meant to carry more cultural dignity.

While people within the urban Aymara community attached little notice in terms of social sense of belonging to the different dress styles of “de pollera” and “de vestido,” people belonging to other social sectors would interpret the dress style of “de vestido” as indicating more acculturation to a modern or occidental way of living than “de pollera.” These images and notions then also affect urban Aymara’s experiences of themselves. National identities are created in social and interactive processes, something that is discussed by Canessa and his colleagues

(2005), who show how metropolitan ideas of nation employed by politicians, the media, and education are produced, reproduced, and contested by people in the rural Andes.

The dominant ideas reproduced by media, for example, may be very influential. Paulson (2002) indicates that the stratification of Bolivia has, for a long time, allowed a dominant national discourse that 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 have usually been 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 have constituted the vast majority of the national population. Yet a dominant national discourse has been created that establishes ethnicity with “the others,” “the Indians,” “the marginalized,” an image of passive women of indigenous background. In keeping with dominant global discourses, Bolivian newspapers and television have announced and repeated key markers of otherness that construe Bolivian majority groups as inferior marginals (*ibid.*). This image of passive women of indigenous background and marginalization does not correspond to the visions of the “indigenous nationalism” proposed by the government of Morales. Yet these are phenomena that the female leaders I interviewed had encountered in their experiences of carrying out their mission. They tell about notions of politically active indigenous women as being “sucia” (dirty), “menor de edad” (minor), “infantilizada” (childlike), and “cerca de la naturaleza” (close to nature). Words like “arrinconada” (put in a corner), “callada” (silenced), “invisibilizada” (invisibilized), “soledad” (loneliness) are common when they tell about their experiences. Antonia Rodriguez, vice mayor of the municipality of El Alto in 2009, expressed her experience as a woman in the political sphere like this:

Well ... they treat us a bit as if they are simulating our participation, but the men are not convinced that we have the same value [as them]...so it has been very, very hard. When you talk in public they silence you... Today, I don't know if you noticed that I don't have the same value as the ordinary mayor [who is a man].

Images of passive, incapable, indigenous women are blamed on colonization, but today these images have been incorporated into the women's “own” group. There are many cases and stories of physical abuse and maltreatment among women who are active mainly on the municipal level. As recently as 2012, a

female municipal representative dressed “de pollera” was reported murdered in the Department of La Paz, with speculations in the press of the murder’s being politically motivated.

What is positive is that there are today alternative expressions of female national identities. One of them is based on complementarity as a “model for” (Geertz 1973: 93) ideal gender relations. The theoretical framework of the current gender equality plan (Ministerio de Justicia 2008) is innovative and combines Andean perspectives with feminist ideas. It expresses the continuing tensions between idealist images of Andean culture and community (with embodied expressions) and new ways of being and expressing a sense of belonging to the plurinational state of Bolivia.

Gender differences are generally emphasized in many different ways in the Andean area, but this fact is questioned and depicted as a historical construction that should not be taken for granted. Under the headline of *Cuerpo* (body) the new plan states:

...es sobre las diferencias biológicas entre los cuerpos masculinos y femeninos que la sociedad ha construido un sistema de jerarquías y valores. El reconocimiento de esta construcción históricamente elaborada, es la puerta de entrada para la fundación de una sociedad donde sea posible “vivir bien.” (Ministerio de Justicia 2008: 16)

Another contested issue is the use that is being made of the memories of the precolonial order:

Es preciso despatriarcalizar la memoria y reconocer que también existen formas distorsionadas de reproducirla, recrearla or recuperarla. Un ejemplo es el uso que hacen algunas corrientes indianistas e indigenistas del concepto de ‘memoria larga’. Apelando a ella, afirman que en las sociedades precoloniales...existía una relación de complementariedad casi perfecta entre mujeres y hombres, que se deformó y envileció por efecto de la colonización, cuando existen claras indicaciones de que esa relación siempre tuvo carácter vertical y no horizontal. (Ministerio de Justicia 2008: 20)

This paragraph signals an openness within the current government to leave the idealizing discourses common within the politics of indigenous identity in favor of a more insightful gender analysis of today’s conditions.

Concluding discussion

Since I came to meet Bolivian society in the beginning of the 1990s I have been struck by the obsession with difference. These expressions of difference always relate to visible and invisible borders between different groups and categories in Bolivian society that stipulate who is supposed to do what, be where, act in what way, and what he or she is supposed to wear. In reviewing some historical sources, it is evident that one aspect of nation-making took the form of a normalization of elite ideals of masculinity and femininity, ideas that did not work well with the practices of the majority. What was considered “proper” behavior and clothing was considered to be different for different social categories, but these categories were also mutually dependent. For example, to be able to fulfill elite ideals of the “lady” it was necessary to have access to servants. A person representing the male elite could show his power by “having access” to other, “not honorable,” women. It is also through legislation that differences based on gender, class, and ethnicity are maintained and expressed through different treatment of different “classes of people.” Differences between different classes are also upheld through different institutions, here exemplified by domestic service, military service, and schooling. This brief review of some aspects of the relations between gender, state, and nation confirms the notion that in the case of Bolivia the intersections between gender, class, and ethnicity have been crucial in structuring gender relations, and even though the basic premises of the state are currently being reworked, this will most likely continue to be so for some time to come. There are strong hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, and class that intersect and shape people’s room to maneuver. Hierarchies are upheld through demands and expectations from within and without, and these borders are changing with the social and political changes. In some contexts they are diminished and even made to disappear, whereas in other contexts they are reinforced or new borders are put up. Shifts of power sometimes turn the former hierarchical roles around. By maintaining difference it is possible to show that there has been a shift of power. At the same time, by granting special rights to indigenous groups, underlining the fact that Bolivia consists of a variety of nations, difference between different categories of people is maintained and even reinforced.

Notes

- 1 Note that this article does not deal with other current expressions of nationalism that would not fall under the banner of “indigenous nationalism.”

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