



Political Gender Dilemmas of Conflict and Complementarity in Bolivia: Quotas, Resistance and Parallelism

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ABSTRACT This article addresses the situation for female Bolivian leaders with an indigenous and social movement background and their possibilities to exert influence and promote female interests. The article: 1) provides an outline of the different contexts in which quotas have been introduced and female participation increased, 2) analyses the roles and relations of the feminist movement and women's organisations, 3) explains why the quality of women's participation has been unsatisfactory (based on interviews with active female leaders and other sources), and 4) discusses some of the reasons why the women might find it strategically beneficial to promote female issues outside the formal structures. The article concludes that female politicians with an indigenous and social movement background need to balance dilemmas of conflict and complementarity in relation to other organised women, politically active men and women, and the organisations/communities that elected them. In this particular context, or system of gender, class and ethnic differences, gender parallelism seems to be a strategy that works. The study is based on literature studies and interviews with female leaders active within different contexts at different levels (local, departmental, or national), conducted during five field visits to the Departments of La Paz and Oruro during the period of 2006-2009, including a short update in 2018/19.

Keywords: Gender quotas, political participation, Bolivia

Introduction

In 2015, Bolivia was praised by the United Nations (UN) for its remarkable advances in terms of equal gender participation in the Parliament and Senate, now reaching 50% and 42%, respectively. Bolivia has not always been an example for the world. On the contrary, before the reforms of the 1990s, its official political sphere was noticeably gender unequal. Since the beginning of 2000, Bolivia has been going through a process of re-structuring of the state that is intimately connected to the organisation of civil society and has also affected female participation. Different factors have caused women's participation in party politics and government structures to increase during the past decade: 1) the introduction of quota laws and new contexts of participation, such as the new local political governments introduced through the decentralisation reform of the mid-1990s, and the constituent assembly of 2007-2008; and 2) the increasing political influence of the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism), through which women active in the social movements have been able to enter party politics.

The present article's overall question relates to the possibilities of and restraints on female participation and influence in relation to decision-making processes within the Bolivian society. The Bolivian legal framework supports equal representation of women and men,

and the legal framework has been developed further with the country's new constitution, but the problem with the introduced gender quotas has been the quality of participation. Electoral gender quotas are usually introduced to increase female representation in leadership positions (descriptive representation) and to improve representation of women's policy interests (substantive representation) (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Pande and Ford 2011). The effects may vary, but they constitute an important symbolic assertion of the value of men's and women's equal rights to representation. The introduction of quotas is often a necessary, but not sufficient condition for achieving the goal of gender equality, especially in situations where there is resistance and a number of complex circumstances interact, but the introduction of quotas does not automatically lead to equality or power sharing. With the good intentions of the government and legislators, what hinders Bolivian women from participating fully? In the following, I address the situation for female Bolivian leaders with a social movement and indigenous background, and examine their possibilities to exert influence, as well as to promote female interests. In a round of interviews with female politicians in Bolivia during the period 2006-2009, I discovered that most of the women – even though they had a formal platform from which they should have been able to promote gender issues – maintained and supported women's organisations within the informal sector. It seemed that they could not promote female interests inside state structures and therefore continued to work for women's rights in informal contexts¹. My two questions are: Given that they were granted equal representation in the country's decision-making bodies, why did they need to maintain their activities in the informal sector? Which different conditions exist within as opposed to outside parliament? Knowing more about these issues, which are both practical and theoretical, can increase our understanding of how the Bolivian political context works, and of how the relation between informal and formal structures of political influence affects the possibilities for men and women to have their voices heard. Political scientists tend to focus only on formal politics, but with a wider anthropological perspective, it is possible to grasp how the situation is understood by people on the ground and why they act as they do. Because the largest number of female politicians have been recruited to the municipal level in Bolivia, these issues relate to the overall theme of this volume on ethnographically informed analysis of municipalities and local governments. In addition, the highest degree of resistance to, and violence against, women's political participation has been reported from the same context.

In order to address the above mentioned questions, I will: firstly, provide an outline of the different contexts in which quotas have been introduced and female participation increased; secondly, analyse the roles and relations of the feminist movement and women's organisations; thirdly, explain why the quality of women's participation has been unsatisfactory (based on the interviews with active female leaders and other sources); and, fourthly, discuss some of the reasons why the women might find it strategically beneficial to promote female issues outside the formal structures and why this may continue to be an important strategy for some time to come.

In order to grasp the Bolivian context of political participation, I think conceptually in terms of a postcolonial, intersectional perspective in an attempt to understand the

¹ An earlier, short version of this paper was published in 2010 as *Active Aymara Women Inside and Outside of Parliament*. In *Power to the People? (Con)tested civil society in search of democracy*. Outlook on Civil Society 1. Centre for Sustainable Development, Uppsala University.

interplay between different social hierarchies that affect people's possibilities in life. I want to avoid the homogenising tendency often found when it comes to women of indigenous background², whose experiences cannot be generalised without problematising gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, etc. As a concept, intersectionality arose as a critique of essentialist forms of understanding social categories that marginalise some experiences at the cost of others. Something particular is produced at the intersections of different social categories, and it is important to analyse how different positionings and identities are constructed and interrelated in specific historical contexts (Yuval-Davis 2006). This position is well in line with the anthropological approach of looking at political subjects that work within systems of ethnic, gender and class differences configured in local places (Aretxaga 1997).

In the case of Bolivian women's political participation, the particular system of ethnic, gender and class differences, is a system in which feminist and ethnic concerns easily clash, thereby producing gender dilemmas for the activists. Olivia Harris, one of the first anthropologists to theorise gender relations in the rural Andean area, characterise gender relations in terms of complementarity and conflict (Harris 1978). Harris outlined the principles of complementarity and unity between man and woman based on the concept of *chachawarmi*, a model founded in the social and economic organisation of the household. However, she pointed to the fact that important aspects of gender relationships could not be accounted for by such a model. It was, for example, when men acted as a group that gender asymmetries became visible. It is not possible to translate Harris' model to the broader national context, even though some of the principles appear in new contexts and discourses. Yet the characterisation of gender relations within politics as tainted by conflict and complementarity is a good starting point for thinking. By looking at the relations of inequality produced at the intersections of different social categories, due to the history and social stratification of Bolivian society, I will show that these gender dilemmas continue to be unresolved.

The study is based on five short fieldwork periods to the Departments of La Paz and Oruro during the period of 2006-2009, including a short update in 2018-19. Methodologically, the focus of the study is on literature studies and interviews conducted with female leaders active within different contexts at different levels (local, departmental, or national): within formal political structures (local and national parliaments) and/or within NGOs, social/unionist movements (local, departmental and national assemblies) and grassroots organisations. Interviews were also conducted with Bolivian scholars and officials with experience from the political sector. Most of the women interviewed have been working at different levels, for example starting in a grassroots organisation or neighbourhood committee, and subsequently elected as councillor at the municipal level, or starting as a unionist representative at the local community, moving through the national federation to an office as parliamentarian or minister of the government.

Increased Female Political Participation

Before I move on to the experiences of the female leaders I interviewed, I want to briefly return to what I started outlining at the beginning of the article. As mentioned, women's

² The label 'indigenous' may refer to people with very different life conditions in Bolivia, as was very clearly shown by Canessa (2014).

participation in party politics and government structures has increased in Bolivia during the past decade due to the influence of different factors. One important factor is the introduction of new contexts of participation, for this issue, especially the new local political governments introduced through the decentralisation reform of the mid-1990s are of prime importance. Another context of importance to Bolivia is the constituent assembly of 2007/2008 that took place during the first round of the MAS government with Evo Morales as president. The increasing political influence of the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism), through which women active in the social movements have been able to enter party politics, constitutes a context per se.

MAS is a left-wing socialist movement founded in 1998. MAS was founded as a political instrument for a number of social movements and continued to incorporate more during the first years of government. In this way, it could be seen both as a political party and as a federation of social movements (Monasterios et al. 2007).

The contexts of political participation in municipalities, and the parliament, and the constituent assembly were introduced together with quota laws. The 1994 law concerning popular participation (municipalisation) promoted the equal participation of women and men and was followed in 1997 by a party law (30% quotation), in 2001 by a communal law (30% quotation), and in 2004 by a law for participation of civic groups and indigenous peoples (50% quotation). In 2006, the law for constituent assembly stated that, on the slate, a candidate of one gender should be followed by a candidate of the other gender, in practice legislating for at least 33% female representation. In 2009, the Congress approved a temporary election law stipulating equal opportunities for men and women, as stated in Article 9:

Candidate slates for senators, titular and substitute deputies, departmental assembly members, departmental council members, municipal council members and municipal authorities must respect *the principle of equal opportunity between men and women, so that a male titular candidate is followed by a female titular candidate, a female substitute candidate by a male substitute candidate, or vice versa*. In the case of uninominal deputy elections, *alternation is reflected in titular and substitute candidates* in each district. (my emphasis)

Parties complied (unwillingly) with the parity law, but only 20% of the elected women were placed as titulars, the majority as alternates. In 2010, the newly elected Congress adopted a permanent election law that better reflected the efforts of the women's coalition. "[T]he new law required that 50% of the titular candidates in all the single member districts nominated by each party be women. In addition, the law recognised gender-based political assault as an electoral crime, with sentences of up to five years of prison" (Htun and Ossa 2013: 12).

Intersectional Relations Within the Women's Movement

The promotion of equal opportunities developed surprisingly fast from the mid-1990s onwards, despite the tensions between the feminist movement and popular and indigenous women's organizations. These tensions concern the relations of inequality at the intersections of class and race/ethnicity that characterise Bolivian society. To understand the current situation, I will start with an ethnographic reflection.

The female branch of the peasants' union Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia "Bartolina Sisa", known as the "Bartolinas", is one of the main organisations within the women's movement representing peasant women

at the local, regional and national level. In January 2019, “the Bartolinas” celebrated its 39th anniversary with a day-long programme including special invitations. Members and former leaders of the Bartolinas participated, and the invited guests were predominantly from the government, the MAS party, the national union of workers and the peasant union. The principal act took place in the courtyard of the national workers’ union’s (COB) headquarters, and all of the current board members of the Bartolinas were lined up on the stage together with representatives of the most important invited organisations. One chair, at the side of the General Secretary, was reserved for the Vice President of the plurinational state of Bolivia. All of the persons on the stage had flower garlands placed around their necks, and the event started with a music group performing a song especially composed for the Bartolinas. Some of the important representatives gave their talks, but everyone was waiting for the most important guest. Finally, the Vice President arrived carrying his little daughter and was surrounded by supporters and representatives from the Bolivian media. He sat down with his daughter on his lap, was wreathed with flowers and greatly acclaimed by the audience. Before he was given the microphone, the moderators of the event reminded the audience of the Bartolinas’ high expectations regarding both moral and actual economic support from the government. The Vice President delivered his speech and expressed support for the movement. I note that, during the formal act of the celebration, no representative of any other women’s or feminist organisation was invited to give a speech.

Tensions based on class and ethnicity between different groups of active women have been present from the start and continue to affect collaborations within the women’s movement in Bolivia. The contradiction between so-called Western feminism and other feminist positions of the popular sectors and/or indigenous peoples may still be found in different contexts and may even have become more polarised during the processes of change taking place in Bolivia during recent years, despite shifts in the distribution of power. The division resembles the conflict found in many other contexts between gender equality as sameness or as difference, but it is intermeshed with conflicts based on differences in class, education, origin and so on. In interviews conducted in 2018 with scholars and officials working with gender issues in different kinds of feminist organisations, the Bartolinas were neither seen as feminists nor as the organisation that would push the government towards a more gender sensitive politics. These views contrast with the perspective of the Bartolinas, who saw themselves as occupying a stronger position than ever. Most members don’t want to call themselves feminists, in fact they often express distance to the feminist movement. It depends more on the connotation of the word “feminist” and who uses it; since they elaborated a plan towards de-patriarchisation presented in October 2018,³ they want to change the current gender order. In the invitation to the above-mentioned celebration, they ended with the phrase “Women’s emancipation is the proper work of the women of Bolivia and the world”⁴. They had no direct influence on the government, but obviously they stood close to it and used their close relations to promote issues they found important.

The Bolivian case is no different from the rest of Latin America, where women’s movements from the 1970s to the present have been described using the phrase “from visibility to fragmentation” (Jaquette 2009). Jaquette points to the fact that, in many Latin-

³ Propuesta para consolidar la equidad. Derechos de las mujeres, desmontando resabios del Estado colonial. Encuentro nacional de mujeres para la Agenda de despatriarcalización para vivir bien. 10-12 de Octubre 2018.

⁴ La emancipación de las mujeres es obra propia de las mujeres de Bolivia y el mundo!

American countries, feminists used to mean urban professional women who worked in cross-class alliances during transition but faced difficulties in maintaining relations to the working-class and the poor after transition (Jaquette 2009: 6). Even if practical gender interests had ‘strategic’⁵ feminist implications, women’s movements were not seen as significant actors in Latin American politics. Jaquette reports that progress on women’s issues depended on a few actors, such as feminist and/or grassroots groups, both urban and rural, women in political parties, elected women and so-called femocrats in government bureaucracies (cf. what I call institutionalised feminists). These actors rarely managed to achieve the level of coordination and consensus that the term movement implies. Women’s movements and activism are described as fragmented and diversified (Jaquette 2009: 208).

During earlier neoliberal restructuring in Bolivia in the hands of the governments of the 1990s, there were many examples of how organised women (in the form of professionalised NGOs) were unable to bridge the gaps of class and ethnicity to provide paths of influence for marginalised groups of women. This legacy influenced the new powerholders based on social movements of the 2000s, who chose to turn their backs on earlier feminist struggles and definitions of feminism in order to find a new, decolonised way of dealing with the issue. Rousseau (2010) mentions that professional women, self-identifying as feminists and with long experience of working within NGOs or state authorities, felt extremely estranged by the new political context and that their contributions were being disregarded and associated with Western imperialism (Rousseau 2010: 157). A process of redefinition of the women’s and feminist movements was very important, considering the earlier conflict between the popular women’s organisations and the institutionalised feminists (representatives of NGOs and state authorities), whose views on the status of gender equality among the rural Andean population were not embraced by the women of the social movements. There were also negative feelings concerning the unequal power relations between institutionalised female organisations supported by the earlier governments (e.g., the neoliberal government of Gonzalo Sanchez de Losada) and international donors, and the female branches of the social movements and base organisations. The conflict was not only a matter of who had the power to define, but also of contradictions based on class, ethnicity and so on.

Rousseau and Morales Hudon (2017), who studied indigenous women’s movements in Bolivia, Mexico and Peru, also identify a process of boundary-making within these movements that sheds additional light on the situation in Bolivia. In all three cases, indigenous women had to defend the recognition of their specific discourse, articulating gender and ethnicity vis-à-vis the women’s/feminist movement. In their case studies, indigenous women organised outside of the established channels of representation of the women’s movements (a phenomenon very prevalent in Bolivia). The majority of the organisations they studied explicitly distanced themselves from feminist movements, although some of their members identified as feminists (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017: 202-203).

There are clear boundaries between the indigenous women’s movements and the feminist movements, but these do not prevent different forms of joint action on the defence of women’s rights from appearing on occasion. In Bolivia, the collaboration between indigenous women’s and feminist organisations – which was previously almost non-existent – proved to be crucial to the work of the constituent assembly in 2009. According to Rousseau

⁵ The distinction between practical and strategic gender needs and interests was introduced by Molyneux (1985) and further developed by Caroline Moser (Moser 1987).

and Morales Hudon (2017), the indigenous women played a key role in the process and therefore were able to pressure the feminist movement to open itself to the demands of the indigenous movement. This key role was influenced by the overall political situation with the MAS in power. With the experiences gained from the constituent assembly, other inter-organisational collaborations to advance joint platforms on women's rights have been created between middle-class urban feminists and indigenous women. These collaborations have been key to the adoption of laws on gender parity and alternation for all electoral processes, mentioned above, as well as laws on political harassment and violence against elected women, among other issues (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017: 203). Htun and Ossa (2013) analyse why, in relation to the 2009/2010 electoral law, women's and not indigenous demands for inclusion were successful in Bolivia. They point to the fact that women overcame divisions between urban feminists and indigenous women from popular sectors to lobby for gender parity.

Experiences of Discrimination and Harassment

The Bolivian legal framework supports equal representation of women and men, and the legal framework has been developed further with the country's new constitution, but women experienced difficulties in participating on the same terms as men. Why has the quality of women's participation been unsatisfactory?

After assuming office, Evo Morales appointed men and women of indigenous descent to cabinet positions (Htun and Ossa 2013). In the 1990s, I met with several of the appointed female politicians in their capacity as leaders of grassroots or unionist organisations. Later on, they became leaders of the *Bartolinas*. At that time, for a woman of indigenous background to achieve a cabinet position was almost unthinkable for most people. Remedios Losa was the first woman *de pollera*⁶ to enter national parliament in 1989. She had indigenous origins, but also an urban background, being the daughter of a tailor and a craftswoman from the city of La Paz.

Although the discourses of indigenous female politicians generally display loyalty to the movement they represent, as in statements such as "Our goal is not to work against our men and the unified struggle"⁷, none of the women I interviewed denied the difficulties faced by female leaders, and experiences of discrimination were common. In interviews conducted with female leaders of Aymara or Quechua background – active at the level of parliament, municipal and neighbourhood committees in the departments of La Paz and Oruro – I explored the ways in which they experienced their political participation. I will discuss three aspects that influenced these women's participation: 1) the way they entered politics; 2) prejudices towards politically active women; and 3) their possibilities to exercise leadership.

First, to fulfil the quota reforms of the 1990s, parties have had to find female candidates for an arena highly dominated by men. Women with an indigenous and/or social movement background stand for the larger part of the increase in female representatives, especially at the municipal level. Most of these women have had experience of working within grassroots organisations, neighbourhood committees, peasant unionist movements, and the like. But,

⁶ *de pollera* refers to the wide colourful skirt worn by women of indigenous background but is also a way to categorize women.

⁷ Sabina Choquetijlla, presidenta de la Confederación de Bartolina Sisa (1991), quoted in Widmark (2010).

due to the high demand for women (in order to fulfil the quotas), many women without previous experience of political administration and law in the formal political sector have also entered party politics during the past decade.

Firstly, political convictions or the desire to exercise leadership were not always the reasons behind women's participation. Most women I interviewed seemed to have entered politics on other grounds, even though strong commitment may have developed with time. In many cases, they were pressured to take on a certain task, with reference to the need to fulfil obligations (*cumplir*) within their community and to display solidarity with their place of origin. Within the Andean communities, communal life is based on rights and obligations, and all married women and men are expected to contribute and take on positions in a rotating system (Albó 1989). Some women had also been appointed due to their level of education and knowledge of Spanish. Rural levels of education have only increased during the past 15 years, and monolingualism and illiteracy (now at lower levels) have been more prevalent in women⁸. Quite a few had a male relative who had been involved in politics (particularly the women who became more important leaders). Having a male relative who is a politician may well be an asset, thus having someone who could serve as a mentor and inspiration, but in some cases the women felt that they had not been elected in their own right. To sum up, the representatives were elected on grounds pertaining to gender and ethnic belonging in order to fulfil the expectations of the base organisations and to loyally serve the people they represented. In several cases, fulfilling these expectations was not possible, and participation implied a cost, which in many cases was perceived as being higher for the women than for the men, given the resistance they experienced just because they were women (Dominguez and Pacheco 2018; Widmark 2010). I will return to this issue later on.

The second issue hindering female participation was found in the way politically active women were viewed. The interviewees testified that the political sphere was seen as belonging to the men. An active woman was seen as someone who breaks the rules. A female unionist leader from Oruro who had to travel a great deal said she was not well thought of in her local surroundings. She told me that people believe a lot of partying takes place at trade union congresses and meetings, along with extramarital relations. "This has always been tolerated for men, but an active unionist woman is seen as immoral", she said. Furthermore, most of the testimonies revealed that it was very difficult for women with an indigenous background to combine active leadership with the role of wife and mother. The same woman from Oruro said that if a woman is to travel, she needs to find another person (usually a female relative) who can take care of her household responsibilities while she is away. Dominguez and Pacheco (2018) refer to the problems of *machismo*, calling it a structural phenomenon shared by indigenous and mestizo women's organisations (ibid.: 8). Ideal male gender relations in Bolivia are not equivalent to what has been labelled *machismo* in ethnographically based literature from Central America (see, e.g., Lancaster 1992; Gutmann 1996). Still, *machismo* of some kind is prevalent in Bolivia and the source behind acts of harassment. There is a conflict here.

Another gender discourse deals with complementarity, which promotes more balanced relations between women and men, as mentioned earlier. In literature from the Andes, several authors have referred to the complementary views on gender relations in the rural

⁸<https://www.education-inequalities.org/countries/bolivia-p-s/#?dimension=community&group=all&year=2000> (accessed 2019-05-01)

areas, where it is the head of the family (usually a man) who should represent the household in the communal assembly. Political decisions are to be made in a consensual manner and the head of household is supposed to consult other members of the household when important decisions are to be made (Albó 1989; Harris 1978). The complementary organisation of gender relations is referred to using the concept of *chachawarmi*, analysed by Harris (1978), in which the conjugal union is seen as a part of larger cosmovision. Ideal gender relations within the Andean context (and from the Aymara perspective) are generally referred to as the union of contraries that complement each other to form a harmonious whole, but under the surface an opposition between man and woman is found. The idea that the relationship between man and woman is conceived of as a union of contraries is, according to Albó, central to the “Andean way of thinking” (Albó 1989). The complementary model is much appreciated in the Andes, but seems vulnerable to social, political, and economic changes. The concept of *chachawarmi* has been further discussed in scholarly works dealing critically with the subject. MacLean (2014), for example, shows the multiple discourses involved in the creation of gender relations in Bolivian communities, a diversity overlooked by political discourses on *chachawarmi*. Burman (2011) discusses different positions in relation to the concept of *chachawarmi*, and what it implies in relation to decolonisation and depatriarchisation.

In the interviews, the women said that, when they participated, they were not supposed to talk very much but wait until they were consulted. “Talk” in itself is an important issue. In the Andean area, cultural notions can be found indicating that women are unable to speak or not interested in doing so (Arnold 1997; Canessa 1997; Harris 1980). The image of the “silent Andean woman” has been questioned and problematised on several occasions (see Arnold 1997; Spedding 1997; Lazar 2008; Burman 2011). I do not doubt that women talk and have an influence on communal and political life, and this has also been ethnographically documented (see Lazar 2008; Spedding 1997). Yet notions and expectations may render the execution of the political assignments more difficult. In my interviews, I learned that one common division of labour based on gender ideas was that the men handle the discourse, and the women execute matters.

The historical silence of women in public life and women’s attempt to gain a voice in politics have been major themes in feminist scholarship. A gendered division of labour and a set of symbolic images not only create gender relations, they are also created by men’s and women’s different opportunities for expression. The verbal practices that take place in social institutions such as political assemblies show that talk is often used to judge, define, and legitimate speakers (Gal 2002). I want to recall, at this point, the fact that the intersections pertinent to Bolivian women’s conditions for participation are part of a historical process involving hierarchisation of the social strata – political power has been concentrated to the elite. A dominant national discourse has been created that establishes ethnicity with “the others”, “the Indians”, “the marginalised” – an image of passive women of indigenous background that has been reinforced by newspapers, television, and other media (Paulson 2002).

A third aspect concerns the possibility for women to actually exercise political leadership, once elected. It is well known that the female quota at the municipal level has been difficult to fulfil; it has also not led to results of acceptable quality, that is, the elected women have not been able to exercise their political labour (Costa Benavides 2003).

According to ACOBOL, the Bolivian Association of Female Councillors, the reasons why most new councillors of indigenous background face insecurity are their low income and educational level, in combination with lack of experience of public administration and juridical knowledge (ACOBOL 2013). According to the same study, rural indigenous women with little experience of political negotiation are criticised in a way that men are not. In the early process there were also examples of women being elected who were perceived as loyal to the party, without previous experience (Booth et al. 1997). The process has not been unproblematic.

Gender-based resistance to female politicians as well as acts of violence and harassment are issues that prevent women from performing well. Antonia Rodriguez, vice mayor of the municipality of El Alto, interviewed in 2009, expressed her experience as follows:

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.

A colleague and I had followed her for a couple of hours and sat in on a municipal meeting. We could see that she was not taken into consideration at the meeting. There could be several reasons for this, but she believed it happened because of her gender.

Many of the women I interviewed testified to the strong resistance to female political participation, especially in the rural areas (see Michao Barbery 2007). Women have, once elected, been harassed and pressured to resign to the benefit of the male person next on the list. ACOBOL reported 572 cases of abuse and harassment from 2000 to 2011 (Htun and Ossa 2013: 11). One woman who had entered local politics in El Alto and was later (unjustly) accused of corruption, said in a regretful tone:

In reality, it can be disappointing, what I can contribute, because, more than good things, bad things happened to me and I regret in my soul, sometimes, that I took on the leadership of my committee, having been in FEJUVE, because I never imagined that the people who were going to be there could suddenly begin to accuse you of everything.

The role of leader was not expected, and there were cases when women were exposed to “political violence and harassment against women” (Krook and Restrepo 2016).

Domínguez and Pacheco (2018) report that democratically elected women still face serious problems at the municipal level when trying to exercise their duties. Apart from generally confirming that harassment and pressure continue, their analysis of the way in which the electoral law of parity, or the rotation principle, is adapted to the principle of complementarity at the community level in rural areas is particularly discouraging. In this process, even though there should be a woman and a man for each position, one as titular and one as deputy, because women still play a secondary role in decision-making, women elected to the titular position are pressured to leave their position to the male deputy (Domínguez and Pacheco 2018: 4). As mentioned by Krook and Restrepo (2016), like other violence against women, violence against women in politics can be seen to serve as a form of gender role enforcement (Donat and D’Emilio 1992). The problem of political violence towards women eventually resulted in the 2012 law against political violence and abuse against women, but it took a long time before it was approved.

The pattern that evolved in the interviews is one in which the women were often pushed into participation in a political sphere that was competitive, corrupt, demanding

and male dominated. They found themselves in hierarchical relations of conflict and alliance – between women and men, among women themselves, and between different groups of women. It was very difficult for them to live up to expectations (Widmark 2010).

Due to the strong male-dominated and clientelist structures⁹ within official politics, as demonstrated by Bjarnegård (2009), a context with considerable corruption will also see many male-dominated networks, building on male loyalty. The high level of political harassment against women in Bolivia could thus be understood as a clash between a male-dominated political system and newly introduced quota laws. Most incidents of harassment of female politicians are reported at the municipal level. Many women are active at that level, and this is also the level at which gender quotas were first adopted. The interviews seem to indicate that the higher the women had climbed up the political ladder, the less harassment they experienced. However, they found it equally, or more, difficult to get their voices heard. Female parliamentarians and councillors whom I interviewed had not been able to promote specific gender issues in relation to their parliamentary tasks, and they had experienced difficulties in forming female networks within this sphere, despite the fact that two out of three were active within base organisations promoting Aymara women. The vice mayor I interviewed confirmed that it was equally difficult to promote female issues in municipal work; she promoted female artisans (often single mothers, widows and the like) in her free time.

During the interviews in 2009, several persons mentioned that, at the national parliamentary level, there was also competition between different ministries. Together with the tradition of clientelism and corruption, this made coordination between the ministries and state secretaries difficult, and it hampered the creation of networks between female parliamentarians and state secretaries. Several interviewees brought up how difficult it was for the Secretariat for Gender Issues to get the ear of the President and representatives of other governmental bodies. It was also difficult for individual female parliamentarians to get support for their ideas. Inside the official structures, women work with ordinary political issues. Gender issues are rarely promoted. Htun and Ossa (2013: 18) point to the fact that coalitions formed by women are often weakened inside the legal (or formal) structure, because they become the subjects of the party leader's imposition of discipline and agenda control.

Relations to *las bases* and Other Dilemmas

The way in which elected women manage (or do not manage) to promote female issues affects their relations to their colleagues in parliament, and to the base organisations that had elected them. Because the governing party MAS consisted of a number of social movements, relations to the base organisations and the people the politicians were representing were very important. The followers, the people who elected them and who are organised in unionist base organisations, are often referred to as *las bases*. The fact that many women were elected in order to fulfil obligations to their home community or organisations, in combination with the fact that members of base organisations are normally very active, makes this

⁹ “Clientelism” refers to a form of political practices common in Latin America that are characterised by “patron-client” relationships. It means that relatively powerful and rich political “patrons” promise to provide relatively powerless and poor “clients” with jobs, protection, infrastructure, and other benefits in exchange for votes and other forms of loyalty, including labour. These relationships are typically unequal and exploitative (see, e.g., Stokes 2011; Lazar 2004)

relation highly important. In my interviews with representatives of the “Bartolinas” (the female branch of the peasant union) and female parliamentarians (former “Bartolinas”), it was clear that relations were not always friendly. The “Bartolinas” were spoken of as if they represent female support of the government, but when I talked to them, they said they didn’t feel listened to at all. Unfortunately, there was also a certain rivalry between former and current leaders in the “Bartolinas”. One parliamentary woman told me she had tried to continue her contact with *las bases*, but “with the new leadership, I was not welcome”. In general, it was very difficult for elected women to fulfil expectations.

Even if Antonia Rodriguez, in the example above, was quick to interpret her difficulties as not being heard due to gender discrimination, gender solidarity may not necessarily be a basis on which women in her position would act. Cabezas Fernández (2014) looked into approval of the law against gender-based political violence by interviewing parliamentarians in 2008. Initially the law was resisted by a majority of the delegates, among them a group of indigenous women. The basis for the women’s sceptical attitudes could be attributed both to them identifying as indigenous persons representing Andean communities where gender relations are organised in a complementary manner and to the fact that ideally communal decisions are based on consensus. The law was interpreted as a law against actions committed by men, and the women opposing it referred to the fact that they were mothers and would not legislate against their sons. Their resistance is interesting because it shows the dilemmas and difficulties associated with the position of women with an indigenous background. According to Cabezas Fernández, they acted from their subjective position as a mother, giving priority to their sons instead of expressing solidarity with their ‘sisters’ occupying political posts. According to the author, acting from the position of a mother was a position they were allowed to take within the patriarchal¹⁰ system that made up the parliament. The opposing women had also referred to the need to agree with the men in a consensual matter (Cabezas Fernández 2014: 34). Eventually the law was approved in 2012, only after the startling murder of a female councillor of the MAS party.

Why Promote Female Issues ‘Outside’ Formal Political Structures?

As mentioned at the beginning of the present article, it seemed that elected Aymara women in the national and municipal parliaments dedicated a great deal of time and resources to supporting the work of women’s organisations outside parliament. The female parliamentarians I interviewed had their roots in Aymara base organisations promoting women’s issues. All of them continued that work outside parliament. One of them used her salary from parliamentary work to finance the office and work of the AMAQ, the base organisation she belonged to. Another woman served for a while as deputy secretary of gender issues and continued to work with and support the organisation where she was formed. The vice mayor dedicated her weekends to a female craft organisation in her barrio. Why did they do these things after having gained a political position in the formal structures? Obviously, the question could also be: Why not? These women had their colleagues and friends in the organisations where they used to work, and this was a place to rest and retreat to when the mandate period was over. They may also have felt obliged to their colleagues (see the discussion on rights and obligations above) or wanted to support their continued struggle.

¹⁰ The term patriarchal system is often used as an overall label for many different male-dominated systems. This is a bit confusing considering the different gender discourses that exist.

There could be several reasons, but another line of explanation could be based on strategic choices, given that the formal sectors didn't allow them to exercise the influence they wanted, and, as explained, they may have found it easier to promote female issues outside parliamentary structures. Due to the strong male-dominated and clientelist structures within official politics, the experiences of many of my interviewees suggest that – for women – promoting female issues in civil society organisations was more effective than working 'inside' the formal political structures, at the time of the study. To further the argument, positioning women's concerns outside parliament is a way to maintain the balance – the complementarity and consensual form of decision-making with the men (see also Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017).

In the 1990s, the trend was to work towards mainstreaming of gender issues and against treating them as particularities within female branches and organisations – as side issues. The data presented in this article reveal that there may not be one general solution. Whether gender issues are best mainstreamed or treated on the side, may depend on the circumstances emanating from local systems of differences. In 1997, Charles Hale illustrated the emerging cultural politics of identity in Latin America with the example of the actions of a group of women in the Nicaraguan unionist movement who formed a separate branch in order to articulate their particular interests. These kinds of politics emerge when a certain experience cannot be articulated within the official structure. The strategies of indigenous women in Bolivia in relation to their unionist organisations reveal difficulties similar to those found in the Nicaraguan case. As mentioned, female indigenous leaders tend to be loyal to the cause of their union or party and do not want to criticise the organisation's treatment of gender issues. Statements indicating that certain critique was not possible to articulate within the movement were collected during the field work, such as: "We want to work for a better society for everybody, not only for the women" (female Quechua leader 2005); "Within MAS we have no discrimination" (Isabel Ortega, parliamentarian for MAS 2006). One of the groups I interviewed in Bolivia in 2007 was a newly formed female branch of a federation of lowland farmers. The women said they had to form a female branch because, even though they were present at their general assembly, their issues and those of their "sisters" at the base in the community were not attended to within the larger organisation. Thus, if they wanted to have a voice, it was more effective to work outside the general assembly. So, this is where Caroline Moser's (1987) framework may apply: a case where work outside the official structure meets practical gender needs within civil society, in a situation where strategic gender interests are still not possible within the official structures or the actors choose not to promote them directly, so as to avoid fragmenting the struggle for a cause that is perceived as more important.

Although the present essay does not mainly deal with indigenous women's organisations, the framework and results of Rousseau and Morales Hudon (2017) may further our understanding of the strategic choice to place the main promotion of women's interests outside the formal political structures. They compared the organising trajectories of indigenous women's movements to mobilise women within indigenous movements in Peru, Mexico and Bolivia, leading to the creation of autonomous spaces from which they speak in their own name. Rousseau and Hudon use a fourfold typology: "women-only spaces in gender-mixed organisations; women-only organisations created out of gender-mixed organisations that remain related to the latter (parallel organisations or 'gender parallelism'); organisations based on gender dualism in all positions of authority (couples fill in all the

positions jointly); and women-only organisation without permanent link to any other organisation (independent organisations)” (2017: 199). In Bolivia, they found “gender parallelism”, i.e., the creation of a parallel organisation for women that remained tied to an indigenous mixed gender organisation. The main example they use is the “Bartolinas”, the female unionist movement mentioned above. This was understood as an important move to strengthen the organisation’s mobilising ability. Other female peasant unions in the tropical valleys and the lowland followed the example. These new female organisations were still related to the mixed gender organisations from which they emerged, but were organised in a parallel fashion with their own statutes and leadership. These organisations differ from the “only-women spaces in gender-mixed organisations” that the authors report from Peru and Mexico, mainly owing to the fact that they can develop a public profile and represent themselves in official institutional settings (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017: 200). The third kind of organisational path based on gender dualism, mentioned by the authors, is unique to Bolivia. The Aymara and Quechua communities, organised through Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qollasuyo, CONAMAQ, follow “a structure of leadership that assigns married couples to fill each position jointly” (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017: 200). This is not implemented on the communal political level¹¹.

If indigenous women were to mobilise around gender and indigeneity to form a collective identity, this would involve the creation of internal boundaries within indigenous movements on the basis of gender. Rousseau and Morales Hudon (2017) report:

However, in Bolivia the making of a boundary within the indigenous movement was somehow avoided through the phenomenon of gender parallelism, Indeed, the opening of the movement to women’s demands was strategically transferred ‘outside’ male-dominated organisations yet presented as the best way to recognize the specific contribution made by women to the movement (2017: 202).

They interpret the pattern of gender parallelism found in Bolivia as a strategy to avoid constructing boundaries within the indigenous movement. When indigenous women act jointly with indigenous male-dominated organisations, they can also pursue “complementary” issues of greater interest to them (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017: 202). A similar strategy may be transferred to the women’s engagement in political state structures where organised indigenous women in Bolivia have benefitted from a political context that has given them access to the state “both as political authorities and through normative changes” (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017: 207).

The phenomenon of “gender parallelism” has expanded concurrently with the strengthening of the indigenous movement in national politics in Bolivia. In sum, during the Morales government, there was a better balance of power between the indigenous movement and the state compared to earlier governments, and indigenous women, such as the Bartolinas, were able to take advantage of that situation. As mentioned earlier, in 2019 the Bartolinas were said to have no direct influence on the government, but they used their close relations to promote issues they found important. According to a consultant to the

¹¹ In Mexico and Peru, there are examples of indigenous women-only organisations without a permanent link to any other organisation, organisations created as a reaction to the national mixed-gender organisations’ unwillingness to integrate gender demands. These are not to be found in Bolivia, which may indicate that indigenous women in Bolivia are more loyal to their organisations or to the ethnic cause – or it may indicate that their gender demands have been met to a certain extent.

movement whom I interviewed, the Bartolinas rarely managed to impose their views by pressure and conflict, but rather looked for other ways to make their male comrades listen, such as inviting the government's representatives to lunch. In that familiar environment, they had an opportunity to express their views and be listened to.

Gender Dilemmas of Conflict and Complementarity

In the present article, I have asked questions about and discussed the reasons why Bolivian women, having obtained descriptive representation, still position the promotion of female policy issues outside parliament. During a short period of time in Bolivia, there has been a drastic change in the form of increased female political participation within official structures as well as class and ethnic representativity. This drastic process of change has affected the quality of participation of newly elected women and other formerly excluded groups, and the strong resistance to change has resulted in increased levels of gendered political violence. In addition, many women have been busy 'proving' their capacity, while they are expected to be loyal to the social and ethnic cause and not to demand rights because they are women. The elected women need to balance these conflictive situations and react against violence and inequalities, in their struggle for a new society in partnership with men in a complementary relation. Due to the robust structures of male dominance in Bolivia, one of the strategies for making gender issues and women's rights issues visible is to work in parallel, women-only organisations 'outside' of formal political structures.

The above sections show how female politicians with an indigenous and social movement background need to balance dilemmas of conflict and complementarity in relation to other organised women, politically active men and women and the organisations/communities that elected them. In this particular context – or system of gender, class and ethnic differences – gender parallelism seems to be a strategy that works, at least for the female branch of the peasant union: the Bartolinas.

Bolivian society is historically divided into social, racial and ethnic hierarchies. Thus, from an intersectional perspective, it is no surprise that the women's movement is fragmented and that different feminisms develop side by side. Although collaborations to advance joint platforms on women's rights have been created between middle-class urban feminist organisations and indigenous women, as seen in relation to the Constituent Assembly and other legal proposals, the social and ethnic conflict remains unresolved, resulting in mutual distancing attitudes. The need to balance conflict and complementarity may also be seen in relation to the feminist/women's movements. The successful collaboration between indigenous women and the feminist movements in elaborating the constituent assembly is an issue that stands out and was possible due to the current political trends. The political ground in Bolivia is shifting with regard to women's participation in politics. This is a slow and difficult process of integration versus parallelism, which requires the constant vigilance of women's movements and groups both within and outside state institutions.

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