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Chachawarmi: Silence and Rival Voices on Decolonisation and Gender Politics in Andean Bolivia

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Abstract. This article addresses the 'coloniality of gender' in relation to rearticulated indigenous Aymara gender notions in contemporary Bolivia. While female indigenous activists tend to relate the subordination of women to colonialism and to see an emancipatory potential in the current process of decolonisation, there are middle-class advocates for gender equality and feminist activists who seem to fear that the 'decolonising politics' of the Evo Morales administration would abandon indigenous women to their 'traditional' silenced subordination within male-dominated structures. From the dynamics of indigenous decolonial projections, feminist critiques, middle-class misgivings and state politics, the article explores the implications of these different discourses on colonialism, decolonisation and women's subordination.

Keywords: coloniality of gender, female subordination, colonialism, decolonisation, *chachawarmi*, Aymara, Bolivia

Introduction

Seated in a row with local male Aymara authorities and specially invited male indigenous intellectuals, Teresa, a young, ethnopolitically engaged *cholita*, has prepared a presentation on the topic 'Decolonisation and Aymara Identity'.[1] For the first time in her life, she is going to speak in public at a rural communal assembly. She is there by the side of her fiancé, a renowned young

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1 A cholita is a young Aymara or Quechua woman wearing the 'traditional' outfit consisting of *pollera* (wide gathered skirt), bowler hat, *manta* (shawl) and two long braids connected by *tullmas* (long, braided hair bands).

indigenous activist to whom everyone listens attentively, and is the next to speak. She looks nervous. Her fiancé concludes his presentation, but the principal local authority (*secretario cantonal*), don Esteban, passes Teresa over and introduces Mariano, one of the invited male intellectuals. Teresa says nothing, but Mariano asks, 'Shouldn't our sister speak first?' Don Esteban looks at Teresa, raising his eyebrows, and then asks with amusement and surprise in his voice, 'Are you going to *speak*?' Teresa blushes, looks down at her notes and says 'Yes'. She rises to her feet and addresses the assembly, initially a bit shakily, but then in a firm voice. She speaks of the importance of maintaining an ethnic and cultural Aymara identity in times of change and posits 'indigeneity' as the foundation for any process of decolonisation.

A couple of weeks later, I talk with Teresa about don Esteban's reaction at the assembly. She says:

> I think it's their way of thinking that the man is superior … It's, how do you say this, a colonial idea … And that's what's coming now: the decolonisation of mentality … The entire indigenous world, in the indigenous worldview, is *chachawarmi* [literally, 'man-woman'], and not only the man.

By coincidence, I run into don Esteban a few weeks later when he heads a rural roadblock. With the national elections to be held in December 2009 fast approaching, don Esteban and his fellow community members protest against the lack of local indigenous representatives from their region on the government party's ballot papers. Among burning tires and fluttering *wiphalas* I talk with him about the assembly.[2] To don Esteban, 'There is no discrimination in Aymara culture; all is one and one is all. It's just that we men are more used to speaking at meetings. So I was a bit surprised when the sister wanted to speak … But here, everything is chachawarmi, man and woman.'

While their understandings of gender relations in contemporary Aymara society differ, Teresa and don Esteban are, in a sense, part of one and the same Aymara quest for decolonisation. Moreover, in order to substantiate their respective notions, both of them make reference to a concept that will be discussed thoroughly in this article: Teresa by denouncing the lack of correspondence between cultural ideals and socio-political practice, and don Esteban by pointing to 'proper' Aymara understandings of gender relations. Chachawarmi is a concept that is enthusiastically endorsed by many Aymara activists in the current 'process of decolonisation' and conveys the prevalent Andean notion of gender complementarity: of the married, heterosexual couple as the fundamental social subject in society, and of female and male

[2] The wiphala is the multicoloured banner that has been used since the early 1970s to symbolise Andean indigenous peoples on a pan-Andean scale. It is currently one of the official national symbols of Bolivia.

forces as the opposing but complementary constituents of the cosmos. Not everyone, however, looks with approval on this reclaiming of 'tradition'. The emancipatory potential of chachawarmi for indigenous women is questioned by middle-class liberal advocates for gender equality and radical feminist activists alike.

This article addresses the 'coloniality of gender' in relation to pervasive Aymara notions of man and woman as they are rearticulated in a disputed process of decolonisation and indigenous activism.[3] It aims to understand notions such as those of Teresa and don Esteban within the socio-political and cultural contexts of indigenous decolonial projections, feminist critiques, middle-class misgivings and state politics. The article is based on several years of ethnographic research in the cities of El Alto and La Paz and some of the surrounding rural provinces, primarily focusing on the intertwining of ritual practice, indigenous activism and state politics. However, the particular issue of the relation between gender politics and notions and decolonisation was more specifically addressed in fieldwork carried out during five months in 2009. Besides the countless hours of informal conversations with a considerable number of Aymara men and women, formal interviews were carried out with 12 women and six men.[4] Most interviewees were Aymara activists of rural origin now dwelling in urban areas, some of whom had experience of higher education. I also carried out interviews with advocates for gender equality and state officials. The national gender debate and the 'politics of decolonisation' were scrutinised.

Feminism versus Multiculturalism

In her influential and controversial essay 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?', Susan Okin answers her own rhetorical question by stating that women from ethnic minorities '*might* be better off if the culture into which they were born were … to become extinct'.[5] Mandy McKerl has noted that Okin's essay is imbued with an implicit assumption that 'West is best'.[6] Intrinsic to this assumption, McKerl argues, is a supposition that Western women who live in liberal democracies are not subordinated to 'patriarchy' as are Other women who were born into Other cultures – that is, Western

[3] María Lugones, 'Colonialidad y género: hacia un feminismo descolonial', in Walter Mignolo (ed.), *Género y descolonialidad* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Signo, 2008), pp. 13–54.

[4] The interviews were mainly conducted in Spanish, with occasional use of Aymara expressions and concepts.

[5] Susan Okin (with respondents), *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 22–3. Emphasis in original.

[6] Mandy McKerl, 'Multiculturalism, Gender and Violence', *Culture and Religion*, 8: 2 (2007), pp. 195, 215.

women project their own experiences of subordination onto Other women and are thereby deceived into believing that they themselves are not oppressed.[7] From this supposition appears to stem a concern for not abandoning Other women to 'tradition' and 'patriarchy'. Okin's essay has been the target of critique; Homi Bhabha, for instance, argues that 'Okin casts a gaze on "non-Western" peoples that comes resolutely from above and elsewhere'.[8]

The current dynamics and politics of 'decolonisation' in contemporary Bolivian society are certainly different from those of the (neo)liberal multiculturalism that has been promoted during the last few decades in a disputed attempt to respond to 'cultural diversity'.[9] 'Multiculturalism' was designed to be functional to the hegemonic project of (neo)liberalism, (post)-modernity and capitalism, and it has, at least in Latin America, fulfilled its purpose.[10] In other words, there is nothing subversive or anti-systemic about a top-down rhetorical recognition of cultural difference. The multiculturalist discourse has therefore been questioned and criticised by activists and scholars arguing for a 'decolonisation' that goes beyond formal political independence (which was gained in Bolivia in 1825) and beyond the recognition of cultural difference. The meaning of 'decolonisation', though, is far from unambiguous in contemporary Bolivian society. In official discourse the government has demonstrated an impressive capacity for semantic and political stretching of the 'decolonisation' concept. It may denote industrialisation, modernisation, development, nationalisation, patriotism or economic growth – but it may also denote a profound critique against, and political measures to counter, capitalism, neoliberalism, racism, sexism,

[7] For the Bolivian context, see Alison Spedding, 'Investigaciones sobre género en Bolivia: un comentario crítico', in Denise Arnold (ed.), *Más allá del silencio: las fronteras de género en los Andes* (La Paz: CIASE/ILCA, 1997), p. 61. For reviews of this debate see Linda Fischer, 'State of the Art: Multiculturalism, Gender and Cultural Identities', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 11: 1 (2004), pp. 111–19. See also Leti Volpp, 'Feminism versus Multiculturalism', *Columbia Law Review*, 101 (2001), pp. 1181–218.

[8] Homi Bhabha, 'Liberalism's Sacred Cow', in Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, p. 82.

[9] On decolonisation, see Anders Burman, 'The Strange and the Native: Ritual and Activism in the Aymara Quest for Decolonization', *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 15: 2 (2010), pp. 457–75; and 'Colonialism in Context: An Aymara Reassessment of "Colonialism", "Coloniality" and the "Postcolonial World"', *Kult*, 6 (2009), Special Issue: 'Epistemologies of Transformation: The Latin American Decolonial Option and its Ramifications', pp. 117–29. For debates on cultural diversity and neoliberal multiculturalism, see Anne Phillips and Sawitri Saharso, 'The Rights of Women and the Crisis of Multiculturalism', *Ethnicities*, 8: 3 (2008), pp. 291–301; Charles Hale, 'Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 34: 3 (2002), pp. 485–524.

[10] *Ibid.*; Nancy Grey Postero, *Now We Are Citizens: Indigenous Politics in Postmulticultural Bolivia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Jorge Viaña, *La interculturalidad como herramienta de emancipación* (La Paz: III/CAB, 2009).

imperialism, developmentalism, ecological depredation or, in the field of knowledge production, eurocentrism and the overrating of any tradition of thought coming from the North, along with the concurrent inferiorisation of any indigenous tradition of thought. Fundamentally, at the centre of the 'decolonisation project' is the revalorisation of what is deemed subaltern and/or denied by colonial power since 1532 and the elimination of the socio-political, cultural, epistemological and economic mechanisms of domination that underpinned the colonial project.[11]

There is not only a difference between the poetics and politics of multiculturalism and those of decolonisation; the situation of 'non-Western' immigrant women in Western liberal democracies that was central to the debate on feminism versus multiculturalism is (needless to say) also different from the situation of indigenous Aymara women in the Andes. Nevertheless, some of the key issues of the debate on feminism versus multiculturalism have currently gained new import in Bolivian society. This is due to the fact that certain non-indigenous middle-class sectors of Bolivian society seem to be concerned that the 'decolonising politics' of the Evo Morales administration would do to indigenous women what liberal Western multiculturalist politics supposedly do to immigrant women, abandoning them to their 'traditional' silenced subordination within male dominated structures through an act of recognition of and respect for cultural difference. Commenting on the difficult situation of indigenous women on rural municipal executive boards, a female middle-class advocate for gender equality told me during an interview, 'There is a bad use of habits and customs and there are bad customs that should be changed and eradicated'.

More or less the same critique of 'tradition', but in a different idiom, is articulated by the small but increasingly influential Bolivian anarcho-feminist movement, an urban radical movement that is looked upon with some suspicion by more 'conventional' liberal middle-class feminists and indigenous activists. According to the anarcho-feminists, 'Andean patriarchy' is concealed by indigenous notions of a non-hierarchic complementarity between men and women (chachawarmi), as promoted by the indigenous movements and many indigenous intellectuals, and currently also to a certain extent by the Morales administration.[12] The new Constitution (approved in the

[11] It should be noted that the official Bolivian 'decolonising politics' still have a recognisable stain of 'multiculturalism' which the diverse strategies of 'decolonisation from below' – I am thinking here of the practices of indigenous organisations, trade unions, indigenous intellectuals and autonomous indigenous educational initiatives – do not have to the same extent.

[12] In her intent to 'lend a voice' to rural Quechua women, I. S. R. Pape articulates a similar critique: I. S. R. Pape, '"This is Not a Meeting for Women": The Sociocultural Dynamics of Rural Women's Political Participation in the Bolivian Andes', *Latin American Perspectives*, 163, 35: 6 (2008), pp. 41–62.

January 2009 referendum) considers women's rights to an extent that is unprecedented in Bolivian history, but this critique notes that the Constitution recognises 'indigenous autonomy' and 'communitarian administration of justice' – that is, it legitimises and justifies indigenous socio-political practices, institutions, norms and values, including those concerning gender. To counter the new Constitution the anarcho-feminist movement presented its own *Feminist Constitution*, in which it declares its aim to 'reject the concept of "chacha warmi"'.[13] It further states that:

> The habits and customs [of the indigenous peoples] are part of the instruments of oppression … To convert habits and customs into law means giving power to the hierarchs of the community and converting the indigenous condition into a conservative and conservationist being which expels and punishes those who wish to change things.[14]

The new national gender equality plan that was presented by the Bolivian government in December 2008 discusses the concept of chachawarmi in some depth and argues for the need to 'decolonise the concept of gender'. As discussed below, however, the gender equality plan directs a critique against '*machismo indigenista*' and aims to 'demystify' the concept of chachawarmi.[15] In this sense, to demystify chachawarmi means to challenge a fundamental assumption of many Aymara activists: that decolonisation would automatically bring about positive changes for indigenous women. This assumption is based on the idea that the subordination and silencing of women must be of colonial origin since Aymara culture is based upon the notions of gender complementarity found in the concept of chachawarmi.

Silence and Complementarity

I opened this article with a description of how a young Aymara woman called Teresa defied male dominance and spoke at a rural political assembly. Sian Lazar and Alison Spedding have, in different ways, shown that Aymara women are far from silent or silenced in all contexts.[16] Urban Aymara women have even developed a special oral skill that Spedding calls 'machine gun volubility', which consists in the ability to rap out so many insults in such a short time and with such force that the opponent is paralysed.[17] At

[13] Mujeres Creando, *Constitución política feminista del estado* (La Paz: Mujeres Creando, 2008), p. 17.

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

[15] República de Bolivia, *Plan nacional para la igualdad de oportunidades: "Mujeres construyendo la nueva Bolivia para vivir bien"* (La Paz: República de Bolivia, 2008).

[16] Sian Lazar, *El Alto, rebel city: self and citizenship in Andean Bolivia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Alison Spedding, '"Esa mujer no necesita hombre": en contra de la dualidad andina – imágenes de género en los Yungas de La Paz', in Arnold (ed.), *Más allá del silencio*, pp. 325–43.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 338.

public meetings and political assemblies, however, most talking is done by men. The 'silent (or silenced) Andean woman' has therefore been a topic in Western anthropological debates since at least the early 1980s.[18] Denise Arnold has argued that the scholarly focus on silent or silenced Andean women should be understood in relation to earlier descriptions of 'Andean man' as 'sad and serious, reflective, silent, and uncommunicative'.[19] It should come as no surprise, Arnold argues, that ever since 'Andean woman' entered into scholarly focus she has been depicted as silent and uncommunicative. Moreover, Arnold claims that it is a Western bias that leads scholars to overestimate the importance of public rhetoric and to interpret silence in communal assemblies as a straightforward proof of discrimination.[20] This, in turn, could be understood against the backdrop of Western liberalism as the dominant theory of citizenship, which emphasises individual rights and individual political participation.[21]

Olivia Harris was one of the first to ethnographically address 'the silent Andean woman'. Harris argues that while men have privileged access to the language of power – that is, the language used in public discourse – women have access to the discursive power of singing. Rather than interpreting this as a straightforward proof of the subordination of women, Harris suggests that these different discursive powers are complementary.[22] Aurolyn Luykx subscribes to the notion that men have privileged access to the language of power, but she argues that men's and women's different relations to language are created and reinforced in schooling, where women are subordinated through a variety of different mechanisms. Luykx sees no complementarity in this; rather, she interprets women's silence as the result of, or even as resistance to, patriarchal structures and sexist values in the classroom.[23]

[18] See, for example, Olivia Harris, 'The Power of Signs: Gender, Culture and the Wild in the Bolivian Andes', in Carol MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern (eds.), *Nature, Culture and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 70–94; Susan Bourque and Kay Warren, *Women of the Andes: Patriarchy and Social Change in Two Peruvian Towns* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1981); Aurolyn Luykx, *The Citizen Factory: Schooling and Cultural Production in Bolivia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999); and 'Discriminación sexual y estrategias verbales femeninas en contextos escolares', in Arnold (ed.), *Más allá del silencio*, pp. 189–231; Pape, '"This is Not a Meeting for Women"'.

[19] David Forbes, 'On the Aymara Indians of Bolivia and Peru', *Journal of the Ethnological Society*, 2: 3 (1870), p. 199, quoted in Denise Arnold, 'Introducción', in Arnold (ed.), *Más allá del silencio*, p. 43.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 47. Arnold's statement resonates with Gayatri Spivak, who argues that Western feminist critics pay their tribute to the advent of the Western talkative female subject without considering how this process was related to and even enabled by the European imperial expansion, and that these critics thereby reproduce the axiom of imperialism. Gayatri Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', *Critical Inquiry*, 12: 1 (1985), pp. 243–61.

[21] McKerl, 'Multiculturalism', p. 189.

[22] Harris, 'The Power of Signs', p. 92.

[23] Luykx, 'Discriminación sexual', p. 210.

Andrew Canessa argues that women's silence in public meetings is due to prevalent (male) notions of women's lack of *mimuria* (memory/intelligence), which in the rural setting of Canessa's ethnography is related to their lack of knowledge of the Spanish language and their supposed more Indian nature, which in this context equals ignorance: 'They don't know how to think'.[24] Arnold argues, however, that Andean women show very little interest for speaking in public and that they have other methods of articulating their voices and influencing decisions, one of which is by way of the loom:[25]

> in weaving certain gendered garments for themselves and for their menfolk, in creatively manipulating their woven texts and the symbolic language embedded within them, women are able to order and define, within the symbolic domain, the relative powers of production and the relative generative powers of reproduction of each gender, and to decide on their relative hierarchical value. A woman weaver is thus able to define in practice the limits and obligations of both genders …[26]

Arnold argues that in relation to national politics, the great majority of Bolivian women are excluded and silenced. However, she contrasts this with rural women's prospect of expressing themselves and exerting influence in their socio-political context; rural women still have the power to move 'beyond silence', and this power stems from their skills in weaving (and singing), which are counterpoised to the male oral discourse.[27]

Though Arnold's work is of great importance, the fact remains that except in some rural regions (such as the Qaqachaka region, where Arnold has carried out extensive fieldwork), few Aymara women today dedicate themselves in any significant degree to 'traditional' weaving and singing.[28] Ever fewer Aymara women weave 'certain gendered garments for themselves and their menfolk', especially in urban areas; they buy European and North American second-hand clothes for a few pesos at the markets in El Alto, La Paz and Oruro. Moreover, the 'symbolic language' that their men currently display on their clothes ('UCLA', 'American Boy Scout' etc.) has been 'manipulated' and 'defined' in places far beyond the reach of Aymara women. With demographic, social, cultural and political changes, it seems that 'male' rhetoric and discursive skills are gaining even more importance,

[24] Andrew Canessa, *Minas, mote y muñecas: identidades e indigeneidades en Larecaja* (La Paz: Editorial Mama Huaco, 2006), p. 117; see also Marisol de la Cadena, '"Women are More Indian": Ethnicity and Gender in a Community near Cuzco', in Brooke Larson and Olivia Harris (eds.), *Ethnicity, Markets and Migration in the Andes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 329–48.

[25] Arnold, 'Introducción', p. 45.

[26] Denise Arnold, 'Making Men in her Own Image: Gender, Text, and Textile in Qaqachaka', in Rosaleen Howard-Malverde (ed.), *Creating Context in Andean Cultures* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 100.

[27] Arnold, 'Introducción', pp. 45, 51; see also 'Making Men in her Own Image'.

[28] See María Eugenia Choque, *Chacha warmi: imaginarios y vivencias en El Alto* (El Alto: CPMGA, 2009), p. 50.

while 'female' skills of articulation, as they are described by Arnold, are becoming less important in everyday contexts or are being promoted and displayed as 'traditional' folklore in a greatly defanged manner. In order to gain influence, Aymara women, especially young urban Aymara women who may lack most kinds of 'traditional' female skills of articulation, would have to gain rhetoric skills and adopt a hegemonic and dominant 'male' discourse.[29] To those of my interlocutors who associate male dominance with colonialism and the national dominant elite, however, the idea of adopting a hegemonic 'male' discourse is not very appealing. Rather, many of them draw on a notion of pre-colonial times, when women and men 'complemented' each other, male and female voices were equally respected, and women's voices were valued in their own right rather than for adopting a dominant 'male' discourse. Interestingly, Arnold tells of a similar notion held by some rural women – that of a 'golden age' when women spoke with much more power in political assemblies.[30]

The overwhelming majority of my Aymara interlocutors – most of them engaged in indigenous activism – relate women's silence in communal assemblies not primarily to alternative female ways of articulation of their voices or to women's lack of interest in making themselves heard in public, but to male dominance, which they, in turn, almost unanimously relate to colonialism. In his strongly Aymara-accented Spanish, a male *yatiri* (shaman) and Indianista-Katarista[31] activist in his mid-fifties explains the situation thusly:

> It's because of the *machistas*. It has come from Spaniard. Men have to be leaders, women have to be inferior. Is there by chance a goddess … ? The man God is machista now … This is not ours, it's Western; of course they brought it here. Now the whole world works like this.

The silencing of women in public and political contexts is certainly only one aspect of female subordination in Bolivia. To this one would have to add the presence of physical, sexual and psychological violence, devaluing of 'female' domestic duties, exploitation of underpaid female labour in the

[29] Cf. Kay Warren and Susan Bourque, 'Gender, Power and Communication: Women's Response to Political Muting in the Andes', in Susan Bourque and Donna Robertson Divine (eds.), *Women Living Change* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1985), p. 271.

[30] Arnold, 'Introducción', p. 45.

[31] *Indianismo* and *katarismo* are ethnopolitical ideologies which have influenced the last few decades of indigenous mobilisations in Bolivia. In order to understand the rise of the Indianista-Katarista movements, one should scrutinise, firstly, the post-revolutionary Aymara experience of continuing socio-political marginalisation and second-class citizenship, and secondly, the collective memory of colonial serfdom and indigenous rebellion; cf. Silvia Rivera, *Oprimidos pero no vencidos: luchas del campesinado aymara y qhechwa 1900–1980* (La Paz: Aruwiyiri, 2003 [1984]).

market division of labour, and much else.[32] Since I am not able to deal with all these aspects in this article and since 'the silent (or silenced) Andean woman' has been central to many debates on the existence of 'gender equality' in indigenous Andean societies, I deal here with the silencing of women as one indicative aspect of female subordination. Specifically, this paper asks: if there is female subordination in contemporary Aymara society, and even more so in Bolivian mestizo-criollo society in general, how does this relate to prevalent indigenous notions of gender complementarity? How do dominant silencing practices relate to notions of chachawarmi?

One of the first scholars to write extensively on the topic of chachawarmi and to introduce the concept to a wider scholarly debate was Olivia Harris. Harris emphasised both complementarity and conflict in the relationship between Andean women and men, and she set the terms for the debate to come on something akin to a 'distinct Andean notion of gender'.[33] More or less at the same time, Tristan Platt enquired into Andean notions of gender and ascertained this new Andeanist research paradigm as he introduced the Quechua concept of *yanantin* when discussing an Andean symbolic system of oppositions and complementarities.[34] Others to have addressed the issue of chachawarmi and/or notions of gender complementarity in the Andes include Silvia Rivera, who speaks of a 'dynamic and contentious equilibrium' between Aymara men and women in the past; Andrew Canessa, who reports on the notion that 'no complete human being exists apart from the conjugal couple'; and Maria Eugenia Choque, who aims at 'demystifying' the concept of chachawarmi and highlights the lack of correspondence between chachawarmi as a cultural ideal and chachawarmi as a socio-political practice.[35]

Interestingly, with few exceptions, the authors mentioned so far relate this lack of correspondence between cultural ideals and socio-political practices to the process of 'modernisation' in one way or another: Rivera emphasises

[32] See Olivia Harris, 'Complementarity and Conflict: An Andean View of Women and Men', in Jean Sybil La Fontaine (ed.), *Sex and Age as Principles of Social Differentiation* (London and New York: Academic Press, 1978), pp. 34–5; Silvia Rivera, 'La noción de derecho o las paradojas de la modernidad postcolonial: indígenas y mujeres en Bolivia', *Aportes Andinos*, 11 (2004), pp. 1–15; Ivonne Farah and Carmen Sánchez, *Bolivia: perfil de género* (La Paz: Viceministerio de Género y Asuntos Generacionales/CIDES-UMSA, 2008); Choque, *Chacha warmi*.

[33] Harris, 'Complementarity and Conflict'; 'The Power of Signs'. See also Billie-Jean Isbell, 'La otra mitad esencial: un estudio de complementariedad sexual andina', *Estudios Andinos*, 5: 1 (1976), pp. 37–56.

[34] Tristan Platt, 'Espejos y Maíz: el concepto de *yanantin* entre los Macha de Bolivia', in Enrique Mayer and Ralph Bolton (eds.), *Parentesco y matrimonio en los Andes* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1980), pp. 139–55.

[35] Rivera, 'La noción de derecho', pp. 2–3; Canessa, *Minas, mote y muñecas*, p. 109; Choque, *Chacha warmi*.

a machista process of syndicalisation of Aymara socio-political structures after the National Revolution in 1952; Canessa underscores the impact that seasonal work migration and military service have on rural Aymara men's gender notions; Arnold points to the 'maternalising' and 'feminising' influence that foreign development initiatives such as the Clubes de Madres have on gender roles and ideals; and Choque highlights the acculturating impact of urbanisation. However, none would be likely to argue that pre-colonial Andean society was a non-hierarchic haven of absolute, symmetric gender complementarity. Perhaps Harris' recognition that the relationship between women and men in the Andes is characterised as much by complementarity as by conflict (and even violence) offers a way to move beyond the apparent irreconcilability between the notion of complementarity that defines the concept of chachawarmi and observed asymmetrical gender relations.[36] 'Complementarity', in this sense, would not imply a permanent harmony, but a dynamics of power, contestation and the continuous re-creation of unity.

In a context where male dominance and the silenced subordination of women are perceived as intimately related to colonialism rather than to any inherent 'patriarchal' nature of indigenous culture and society, the horizons envisioned in the quest for decolonisation would seem to offer a way to move beyond not only colonialism but also male dominance and the subordination of women.[37] However, this quest also seems to move beyond Western liberal notions of gender equality – moreover, in some aspects it seems to collide with these notions. Consequently, it is important to pose the question: what would a project of decolonisation mean for indigenous women? Would decolonisation weaken or strengthen indigenous women's position and rights in society? At the core of this question is the issue of whether the contemporary subordination of women in Aymara society results from a colonial imposition or is to be considered an inherent trait of Aymara culture. If the former, the politics of decolonisation would be promising; if the latter, the politics of decolonisation would end up substituting one means of female subordination for another. Is the idea of a symmetric complementarity between men and women, of chachawarmi, a notion that conceals gendered asymmetric relations of power and that male indigenous activists have managed to position as a hegemonic or unquestionable absolute of indigenous culture? Or is it a notion that opens up possibilities for indigenous women (negated, subordinated, rejected as political subjects, as citizens, and fundamentally as producers of knowledge and

[36] See, for example, Olivia Harris, 'Condor and Bull: The Ambiguities of Masculinity in Northern Potosí', in Penelope Harvey and Peter Gow (eds.), *Sex and Violence: Issues in Representation and Experience* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 40–65; and 'Complementarity and Conflict', pp. 34–5. [37] See, for example, Burman, 'The Strange and the Native'.

enunciators of subversive horizons of socio-political change) to recreate and emancipate themselves as indigenous women in a colonial world, but in a way that differs from the modern liberal project of female emancipation in the North? This would seem a closed approach since it disregards the notion of complementarity as hardly a concealing *or* an emancipatory idea in itself, but rather depending on who uses it, in which contexts and for which purposes. In the national Bolivian debate, however, the issue is often discussed in a somewhat dichotomised manner.

This article aims not to give a straight answer to the questions above, but rather to engage with what is a serious existential and political matter to the Aymara women and men of the Bolivian Andes. In other words, it does not aim to establish whether decolonisation, as it is currently being implemented in Bolivia, is 'good' or 'bad' for women in Okin's sense, but rather to understand the different discourses concerning decolonisation and gender that articulate answers to this question. In one way or another, all these discourses make reference to the concept of chachawarmi.

'*We too have Gender*': Chachawarmi *in the Indianista-Katarista Movement*

In 2000, Felipe Quispe Huanca 'El Mallku' headed an indigenous uprising, blocked the roads all over the Bolivian *altiplano* and laid siege to the city of La Paz. A much more subtle indigenous rebellion had been taking place for some time, however – one emphasising 'indigenous knowledge', 'proper Aymara thinking' and 'Andean socio-political structures'. A few months after El Mallku's uprising, I began to work as a volunteer in a small Aymara organisation within the Indianista-Katarista movement. Decolonisation and *pachakuti*, the Aymara-Quechua concept for a deep transformation, a cosmic cycle of an insurgent return of time and space, were on the agenda. Andean territorial and political institutions such as *ayllus* and *markas* were reconstituted, and Aymara norms and values were to be rearticulated. The organisation in which I worked depended on foreign development cooperation agencies, and the concept on the lips of all development bureaucrats at the time was *género* (gender); if you were unable to prove that you worked with gender issues, you were out of the game. So my Aymara workmates (ten in total, five women and five men) and I sat down to design a *plan de género*, a gender plan. However, the plan that soon took form in our draughty El Alto office was quite distinct from what one might expect from the perspective of conventional liberal policies for gender equality. It was an indigenous counter-narrative against what was identified as the individualistic narrative of female emancipation as articulated in and by the North. In this sense, this counter-narrative resonates with the critique that has been directed by 'women of colour feminists' against Eurocentric 'white' feminism for its

universal pretensions in speaking of 'Woman' as though all women shared the same form of oppression regardless of their position in a colonial and racialised world.[38] It was a narrative of chachawarmi and *jaqi* ('person'; a married man or woman or the married heterosexual couple as social unit); a narrative of complementarity, unity and dynamic equilibrium between man and woman; a narrative of political authority exercised by husband and wife together.

I soon came to embrace this notion of chachawarmi as an obvious truth concerning Aymara gender notions and practices. This is how it was presented to me, not only by influential Aymara male activists and intellectuals but also by many Aymara women working within the movement. My understanding of the concept has since become less naive, but, simultaneously, my eyes have been opened to the cosmological depth and existential intensity that the concept implies to many of my Aymara interlocutors and friends. Moreover, the concept has since gained much more political import, in the sense that it is currently considered a serious alternative to liberal notions of gender equality, or at least a notion worthy of being addressed in national debates on gender equality, by more than a few radical Aymara intellectuals.

Due to the multiplicity of voices speaking on the subject, there are few, if any, simple truths to be told about chachawarmi. Although some of my female workmates criticised what they experienced to be the gerontocratic structure of the organisation and the machista nature of urban Aymara society, they apparently saw – or expressed – no need for the policies of gender equality as pushed for by the foreign development cooperation agencies. Rather, when they articulated criticisms (often in informal contexts over a coffee or sharing coca leaves) they did so in the idiom of chachawarmi, pointing to the lack of correspondence between ideals and actual sociopolitical practice and conjugal relations. On the one hand, in this specific context chachawarmi was the culturally sanctioned idiom, perhaps the only one in which one could articulate a critique without running the risk of appearing as an acculturated *feminista* ('feminista' is often used as an insult in this context). On the other, in contact with powerful Others (national government officials and foreign development bureaucrats, for example), my female workmates seemed proud to be able to express that 'We too have gender!' and they advocated for chachawarmi as a proper Aymara concept and practice of 'gender complementarity'. They often added, however, that ideals and realities seldom coincide, since leading male activists often use

[38] See, for example, Lugones, 'Colonialidad y género'; Chandra Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarships and Colonial Discourses', *Feminist Review*, 30 (1988), pp. 61–88; Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987).

chachawarmi as a 'culturalist' rhetorical device instead of considering it a concrete socio-political system to be put into socio-political practice.

A common view among Aymara women and men in the Indianista-Katarista movement is that in comparison to notions of gender advocated for by non-indigenous middle-class Bolivians, radical feministas and foreign development cooperation agencies, Aymara gender notions are more sophisticated and comprehensive since they apply not only to human beings but to the cosmos in its totality.[39] As Teresa explains: 'Not only man and woman are chachawarmi; for example, Inti Tata [Father Sun] – Pachamama [Mother Earth], chachawarmi as well, right? … The birds as well, every being that exists in the *pacha* [cosmos] is chachawarmi.'

While doing fieldwork among Aymara yatiris, I was often told that the pacha consists of one overarching male spirit associated with the upper celestial spheres and one underlying female spirit associated with the lower telluric spheres. This twosome/paired/dual notion of the cosmos is reflected in what is often translated as 'Mother Earth' – Pachamama or Pacha Tayka – and the male ancestral mountain spirits, the *achachilas*, that hold the most prominent positions in *akapacha* (the mundane world). Beyond the achachilas, in *alaxpacha* (the celestial sphere), Tius Awki, a syncretic term from an alteration of *Dios* (God) and 'Awki' from Aymara for Father, and also known as Pacha Awki or Pacha Tata (often personified in an Andean version of the Christian God or in Tata Willka, the Father Sun), embodies male procreative cosmic powers, while Pachamama embodies the female, fertile cosmic powers of the earth and the underground (*manqhapacha*).

In order to explain Aymara gender notions, yatiris and Aymara activists often refer to an analogous relationship between male-female, up-down, right-left, front-back, light-darkness and white-colour. Nothing seems to be absolute and exclusive, however; everything seems to contain something of its counterpart and may temporarily transform into its counterpart, thus establishing new relationships by means of other qualities. For instance, in certain narratives the moon appears as the sun's brother and therefore as male and is consequently called Phaxsi Tata or Tata Phaxsi Willka (Father Moon).[40] However, the most common denomination of the moon is currently Phaxsi Mama, meaning Mother Moon. This puzzled me at first. How could the moon be both male and female? My yatiri interlocutors had the answer. The moon is located in the upper male sphere called alaxpacha and is therefore male in relation to any being located in the lower worlds of akapacha and manqhapacha. In relation to Pachamama, for example, the

[39] See, for example, Félix Layme, 'El género en el mundo Aymara y Quechua', *CDIMA Panel*, 20 (2004), p. 30.

[40] See, for example, Carlos Yujra, *Laq'a Achachilanakan Jach'a Tayka Amuyt'äwinakapa: los grandes pensamientos de nuestros antepasados* (La Paz: CAUP, 2005), pp. 11–25.

moon is male and as such associated with right, up, white, light and front. In relation to the sun, however, the moon is female, since it is associated with the night, and thereby with darkness, left, down, colour and back. These relative gender positions do not fall into a clear-cut dichotomy of 'maleness' versus 'femaleness'; they arise only in relation to one another. But fundamentally, they complement each other and constitute a dynamics of unity. In this sense, many of my informants claim, man and woman should complement each other in a non-hierarchic manner and should constitute one complete social being in the married couple: chachawarmi. This is reflected in the fact that no one is considered a complete social person (jaqi) before marriage and, consequently, that no unmarried man or woman may be designated to a position of authority in either the rural community or the urban neighbourhood.[41] It is likewise reflected in decision-making (at the household level as well as the community or neighbourhood levels), since ideally no decision should be taken without the consent of both spouses. Accordingly, the family father is no more head of the household than the family mother; rather, man and woman should complement each other as 'equal but different' in all their doings – in their domestic duties, in the fields, as wage earners, as parents, in the public and political spheres, and so on – each with their particular but equally valued tasks.

Lines of reasoning such as these constituted the fundamentals of the gender plan that my Aymara workmates and I designed in order to please and simultaneously question the foreign development cooperation agencies. In response to conventional liberal politics for gender equality, many of my Aymara activist interlocutors, male as well as female, asked themselves questions which could be synthesised in the following ways: if the subordination of women is a constitutive trait of modernity and by extension of colonialism, would modernity – embodied in this case by liberal policies for gender equality as articulated in and by the North – provide a solution?[42] Would 'the racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies that were put in place or strengthened by European modernity as it colonised and enslaved populations throughout the planet' be most efficiently responded to by more European modernity?[43] Their answers tended to be negative. Instead, they proposed solutions from other cultural contexts, socio-political practices and

[41] Interestingly, exceptions are made now and then for unmarried men, but not very often for unmarried women. Moreover, the female part of the married couple is often there to 'accompany her husband', who is the one who actually is the authority.

[42] For subordination as an extension of colonialism, see Billie-Jean Isbell; 'De inmaduro a duro: lo simbólico femenino y los esquemas andinos de género', in Arnold (ed.), *Más allá del silencio*, p. 257; Lugones, 'Colonialidad y género'.

[43] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept', *Cultural Studies*, 21: 2–3 (2007), p. 261.

epistemic traditions; to contest male dominance in the same move and by the same means as combating colonialism, since male dominance and the subordination and silencing of women are conceived as innate components of colonialism.

These issues are hotly contested, however, and they engage academics as well as activists. This was vividly illustrated a few years ago at the presentation of a new book on decolonisation and modernity at the annual La Paz book fair when one of the commentators, a locally renowned intellectual, dared to suggest that chachawarmi was more of an ideology cherished by urban intellectuals than an actual feature of contemporary indigenous society. He was met by a dense wall of opposition made up of rural and urban indigenous activists, male and female, who claimed chachawarmi to be a constitutive trait of Aymara culture and a contemporary rural socio-political practice.

To Decolonise Pre-Colonial Patriarchy: Chachawarmi *in the National Gender Equality Plan*

While chachawarmi has been advocated by the Indianista-Katarista movement and debated among (mainly foreign) anthropologists for some time, the concept has only recently found its way into official state politics and policy debates. A new national gender equality plan presented in December 2008 argues for the need to decolonise the concept gender, which would mean:

> recognising that the unjust relations between men and women that we can verify here and now *are not only a colonial heritage*; they were also present before, in the native cultures; in this sense, to decolonise gender means *recovering the long memory of women's struggles against a patriarchy that was installed even before the colonial invasion*; consequently, in the same sense, the existence of Bolivian, indigenous and popular patriarchy and machismo with their proper and particular traits, should be denounced.[44]

The decolonisation project put forward in this plan is extraordinarily far-reaching; it stretches into the pre-colonial past and aims at decolonising the male dominance that 'certainly was present in the pre-colonial societies too'.[45] Moreover, in order to create 'free men and women' the plan aims at 'doing away with the socialisation of women into the female gender and the socialisation of men into the male gender'.[46] Consequently, the plan does not endorse indigenous notions and practices of 'complementarity' between man and woman and argues that indigenous women are deceived by concepts that conceal reality: 'Since they do not have the tools of denunciation and

[44] República de Bolivia, *Plan nacional*, p. 32. Emphasis in original.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 48–9.

exposure of patriarchal structures … the analyses that indigenous women and women from the popular sectors make lead them to uncritically embrace concepts that conceal the discrimination and subordination of indigenous women, as for example chacha-warmi.'[47]

The plan recognises that indigenous women have their 'own ways of seeing and naming their situation', but they are held to 'waver between the reality that their own bodies live and the myth of a supposed equality'.[48] In this sense, the great majority of Bolivian women, the 'indigenous women and women from the popular sectors', are characterised as incapable of analysing and understanding their own situation, and their readings of reality are disregarded. According to the plan, indigenous women are simply not prepared to tackle male dominance and indigenous machismo – they lack the fundamental insights and analytical tools required – and in order to understand their own lived experience they are in need of knowledge and analytical tools from elsewhere. To describe indigenous women in the South as helpless victims in need of external assistance is nothing new. Such implicit or explicit characterisations are found in development cooperation policies, travel books and academic texts alike. This situation should be understood against the fact that 'The vision of suffering women in Third World countries has … a strong hold on the Western imagination'.[49]

According to the new national plan for gender equality, then, chachawarmi, in the past or in the present, is a concept that conceals discrimination and subordination of women. Nevertheless, the plan states that the concept could be worth recovering as a 'creative anticipation' – that is, not as a category of reality but as a value, an intention.[50] In other words, chachawarmi could perhaps serve an emancipatory purpose if it is thought of as a model *for*, and not a model *of*, symmetric gender relations.[51]

'*What do they Know … ?*' Chachawarmi *According to* Chachas *and* Warmis

I have discussed parts of the new national gender equality plan with a substantial number of Aymara women and men of different ages. I met no one who did not look with a certain amount of distrust upon it.[52] Doña Graciela, a woman in her fifties to whom I read a few passages, shook her head and

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 30.
[48] *Ibid.*
[49] McKerl, 'Multiculturalism', pp. 202–3; see also Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes'.
[50] República de Bolivia, *Plan nacional*, p. 34; see also Farah and Sánchez, *Bolivia*, pp. 89–91.
[51] See Charlotta Widmark, 'The Power of "Andean Culture" – Bolivian Debates on the Decolonization of Gender Equality Within and Outside the Framework of the State', paper presented at the Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Rio de Janeiro, 11–14 June 2009.
[52] There was one significant exception, however: the author of the conceptual framework of the plan, who, as we shall see below, self-identified as Aymara.

said with pity in her voice: 'This must be the opinion of a feminista!' It should be noted that doña Graciela is a well-known indigenous activist and a determined advocate for indigenous women's political and civil rights. Nevertheless, she does not identify with the mestizo-criollo urban middle-class feminists who she presumes wrote the national gender equality plan, and she does not subscribe to their analyses or conclusions.

Doña Graciela was certainly right in assuming that the plan was written by a feminist, but she was wrong in presuming the author's non-indigenous middle-class background. The conceptual framework of the plan was written by Julieta Paredes, a prominent figure in the rise of the Bolivian anarcho-feminist movement in the 1990s. An intellectual, activist, lesbian and self-identifying Aymara, Paredes has been on a constant collision course with non-indigenous liberal middle-class advocates for gender equality as well as with whom she calls the 'machista brothers' of the indigenous movement (including President Evo Morales). It even turned out that essential parts of the national gender equality plan were taken directly from Paredes' book *Hilando fino: desde el feminismo comunitario*.[53] The book is described as a manifesto for 'communitarian feminism' against the individualist currents of 'conventional' Western feminism which according to Paredes characterises not only middle-class advocacy but also the anarcho-feminist organisation Mujeres Creando (Paredes herself once headed this group but then left and founded the organisation Comunidad Mujeres Creando Comunidad). Despite its name, Paredes' communitarian feminism as exposed in the national gender equality plan is far from an uncontroversial reflection of any widespread notions in the contemporary Aymara community.

When I talked about the plan with Aymara women and men, there were three interlaced issues that received the most intense discussion: the implicit assumption that chachawarmi is more of a recent invention than an inherent trait of Aymara culture; the assertion that women were subordinated and oppressed in pre-colonial societies and, consequently, that the systematic subordination of women is not only a colonial imposition; and the claim that there is a breach between chachawarmi as a discourse and as a socio-political practice. In order to understand chachawarmi according to those directly implicated by the concept, this paper will explore these questions one by one.

Firstly, 'authenticity' is central to many indigenous peoples' struggles since many of their demands are articulated around notions of origin, descent and cultural continuity. Accordingly, most of my interlocutors reacted forcefully against the claim that chachawarmi represented a recent 'invention of

[53] Julieta Paredes, *Hilando Fino: desde el feminismo comunitario* (La Paz: CEDEC/Comunidad Mujeres Creando Comunidad, 2008).

tradition' rather than a primordial trait of Aymara culture. To them, the fact that the cosmos (pacha) is constituted according to the logics of gendered complementarity and symmetric oppositions would be the ultimate proof of chachawarmi; of its existence, its realness and veracity not only in the human realm but as an organising principle of all life and all beings. One does not come up with a model of such magnitude and complexity in a twinkling, they seemed to argue. The majority of my interlocutors experienced that a questioning of the ancientness of chachawarmi and of its nature as an innate part of Aymara culture would imply a questioning of its authenticity and by extension of its legitimacy. What is more, if that questioning comes from the dominant non-indigenous social sectors, it is experienced as a colonial denial of the value of indigenous culture. However, one of my interlocutors, a male Aymara activist and intellectual in his mid-thirties, did not share this concern: 'So what if it is an invention? What are *they* [that is, the dominant non-indigenous people] capable of inventing?' Interestingly, my Aymara interlocutors all presumed that the plan was written by non-indigenous middle-class feministas. As another male activist said, 'What do *they* know … ?'

Secondly, most of my interlocutors reacted forcefully against the claim of male dominance in pre-colonial Andean societies. Some of them speculated that perhaps in Tawantinsuyu (the Inca state) there might have been male dominance and 'patriarchy', since the Inca was the sole male sovereign of the state. One young male Indianista-Katarista activist said: 'The names [of the Incas] were usually like Atawallpa or Waskar; still today we don't know their wives, the names of their wives and all that. Although there was [male dominance], I don't think there was much subordination of women … in this sense there was respect.' Similar but more critically expressed arguments were brought up in interviews by female non-indigenous middle-class advocates for gender equality in order to demystify the supposed symmetric gender relations that existed in indigenous society:

> The Incas were profoundly machista. The idea to have, in Lake Titicaca, a centre of women, the *ñustas*, virgins, destined for the Inca, is an absolutely machista and patriarchal vision … And women didn't exercise the right to participate in decisions … There is a romanticisation of the past, which is normal and natural in a process … of recovering the value of cultures … But they were probably just as machista as our Western cultures.

However, many of my Aymara interlocutors argued that such notions are due to the fact that 'history was not written by us'. As one male Indianista activist put it:

> In the Bible you can see that a prophet could have a thousand, two thousand, perhaps three thousand women, right? And then in the history here, they say that the Inca as well had his virgins. That is completely false, because then there would be no chachawarmi, right? … History lies, because it wasn't created by us, yet.

The crucial question here is the historical relationship between colonialism and male dominance. While the overwhelming majority of my Aymara interlocutors hold that male dominance and women's subordination are indissolubly parts of colonialism and that, consequently, there was no (or hardly no) subordination of women before 1492, non-indigenous middle-class liberal advocates for gender equality tend to doubt the inseparability of male dominance and colonialism. And then there are those, such as Julieta Paredes, who turn the line of reasoning around and posit colonialism as a specific part of a much more general and comprehensive structure of 'patriarchy' that was present in the world long before Christopher Columbus set sail. When I spoke with Paredes about this, she said: 'It's not as though patriarchy comes with colonisation. That's a lie … Our brothers read history as they please, just like the *q'ara*.[54] They don't read what our great grandfathers did to our great grandmothers … There is colonisation, but colonialism is part of patriarchy.'

Thirdly, both *chachas* and *warmis* have so far been in disagreement with the claims made in the national gender equality plan, but when it comes to the claim that there is a breach between cultural and political discourse and socio-political practice, they agree almost unanimously. Doña Graciela, the female Aymara activist mentioned above, explained this by recalling a discussion she had with a male Aymara intellectual a few years ago concerning the appropriate dress code and manner for indigenous authorities:

> He said that an indigenous authority has to wear poncho, right? He has to wear a whip, he has to wear *istalla* [a textile wrap for carrying and storing coca leaves] and he has to wear *ch'ullu* [a knitted cap], and he has to have his wife by his side, right? Then I said that we women are not men's paraphernalia; we have the same right to exercise a public office.

Doña Graciela's assertion of women having 'the same right' includes women's right to speak in public, to be listened to and to be taken seriously as political subjects. However, male and female interlocutors coincided in stating that men speak in public much more than women do and that men exercise political power much more directly than women. Their respective explanations of why this is the case differed. Male interlocutors tended to speak of women as shy and inarticulate – that is, they tended to speak of women as *silent*. A male indigenous Aymara authority (*mallku*) explained the situation: 'Women know of the problems, but they don't know how to explain them very well. That's why men speak more, and more profoundly'.

[54] *Q'ara* is the Aymara term for Bolivians of European descent. It literally means 'peeled', and its usage is often explained with an anecdote about how the Spaniards came to what today is Bolivia 'without anything; no women, no belongings, no land' – that is, peeled. The dominant group are culturally and socially peeled.

Female interlocutors tended to speak of women in the same terms, but they related this to the fact that if they speak in public they are subjected to male taunts and questioning, and some speak of men's strategic dirty play to keep women out of political decision-making; that is, they tended to speak of women as *silenced*. Teresa, the young cholita who appeared at the beginning of this article, explained: 'Sometimes we don't have this courage to speak, to express our opinions; sometimes we keep it to ourselves. There is a bit of shyness, because if I speak bad, if I make a mistake, they will laugh; that's the fear.'

My interlocutors coincided with the national gender equality plan in their opinion that symmetric and complementary gender relations are more a discourse than an actual social practice. However, their proposal to come to terms with the breach between discourse and social reality is different from the 'communitarian feminism' reflected in the plan and which sees chachawarmi as a concealing concept. Leonilda, a young Aymara rural leader, articulated her vision: 'It's not about confronting the men. First of all there has to be respect, and those ancestral values that have existed for 60,000 years of history – I think we have to reclaim those values.' In a similar vein, Teresa suggested:

> To me, it would mean starting with … how the authorities were before; for example, the *jilaqata* [male ayllu authority] with his woman, right? … *Mama t'alla* [female ayllu or marka authority], right? … Before, everything was equal. My grandparents did more or less everything in an equal way.

The crucial question in this debate is whether chachawarmi is a notion that conceals mechanisms of women's subordination or a notion that opens up possibilities for indigenous women to reclaim rights by denouncing the breach between discourse and practice. With feminist critiques in mind, the discourses and experiences of two Aymara women could provide a hint of the multivocality of chachawarmi and of the diverse set of uses to which the concept lends itself.

When Leonilda denounces machismo and the subordination of women, she does it by saying 'Janiw jiwasan amuy sarawi sarkitix': 'That's not our way of going ahead and thinking.' 'Our way of going ahead and thinking', according to Leonilda, is chachawarmi. Moreover, Leonilda's way of breaking with her subordinated and silenced position in society (overcoming shyness, speaking in public, taking an active role in the political life of her community) does not imply that she rejects the culturally sanctioned notions of complementarity between man and woman. Rather, it implies that Leonilda constitutes herself as warmi within the conceptual and cosmological framework of chachawarmi, but without accepting a silenced, subordinated position and without accepting that chachawarmi should entail any gendered hierarchy.

Likewise, since she was a young woman in the incipient indigenous movement of the 1970s, doña Graciela's life has centred on two issues: first, Aymara identity and culture, and second, indigenous women's rights. Her challenge has been to struggle for indigenous women's rights from within the cultural logic that she experiences as her own and which during the last few decades has turned into a powerful indigenous political discourse. When I first met doña Graciela some ten years ago she was a *mujer de vestido*, a woman of indigenous origin who does not wear the typical *pollera* but rather wears 'Western' dresses and skirts or blouses and trousers. When I met her a few years later she was a *señora de pollera* – she had begun to wear the 'traditional' clothes of an Aymara woman. It is quite common to hear of women who migrate from the countryside to the city and then change from pollera to vestido, but it is more unusual to hear of women who change from vestido to pollera.[55] My curiosity urged me to ask her why she had done so. This was her account:

> In 2003 I changed my clothes, because I didn't feel comfortable. It was in the Gas War in 2003, Black October … We fought together with the people of El Alto … and we saw how people died in front of us. Then, I think, it was a situation of fury; I don't know. But I said, 'These clothes that I wear are not mine and they have to disappear; they have to be burned'. So I took out all my clothes to the patio and I set them on fire … I had some polleras stored away and I put on the pollera … and the manta and I went out like this, and my children said, 'Mum is crazy' … My *compañeras* asked why I came dressed de pollera. 'From now on you will see me like this – I will never change again'.

Wearing a pollera, doña Graciela rearticulates her status as an indigenous woman. As argued by many scholars, 'Andean woman' is held to be a carrier of 'tradition' and 'culture'; she is held to be more 'Indian' than her male counterpart.[56] This idea has linguistic and demographic dimensions: at least in the past, women travelled less frequently outside the rural community and had less command of Spanish. But it also reflects the fact that the great majority of Andean men adopt a more 'Western' dress code, while a significant number of Andean women still wear the pollera.[57] The fact that doña Graciela rearticulates herself as an Aymara warmi in this way does not

[55] Doña Graciela is by no means unique in this sense. The last ten years have seen the rise of a new 'ethnic pride' among urban and rural Aymara people, and this process takes different material and ideological expressions.

[56] See Andrew Canessa, 'The Indian Within, the Indian Without: Citizenship, Race, and Sex in an Andean Hamlet', in Andrew Canessa (ed.), *Natives Making Nation: Gender, Indigeneity and the Nation-State in the Andes* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2005), pp. 130–55; De la Cadena, '"Women are More Indian"'.

[57] It is of course a matter of fact that the pollera is an Andean version of nineteenth-century European fashion, but today the pollera is intimately associated with Andean indigenous women and serves as something akin to a marker of ethnic and class belonging.

mean that she accepts a 'traditional' subordinated and silenced position as an indigenous woman. Rather, doña Graciela explicitly states the emancipatory potential in positioning herself as an indigenous woman, and not as something or someone else.

Viewed from a distance, the discourse of chachawarmi may seem to conceal more than it opens up. I have seen with my own eyes how the concept has been used by leading men in indigenous organisations to wave away any questioning of male domination, the lack of women in important positions and the lack of female voices in political debates and communal assemblies. However, if one tries to understand the existential significance of the term to those directly implicated by it, and if one does not content oneself to consider Aymara women as victims but instead views them as creative agents and as producers of knowledge, visions and politics, then other horizons of meaning open up. If colonial impositions such as citizenship, *la patria*, and racial and colonial categorisations (such as *el indio*) can be resignified and turned into tools of emancipation for indigenous peoples, why cannot indigenous notions of gender – although they may have been used in certain contexts to conceal colonial mechanisms of subordination – be transformed into tools of emancipation by indigenous people who identify the subordination of women as an inherent trait of colonialism?

'*They Even got at* Chachawarmi'*: The Reach of Colonialism and the Meaning of Decolonisation*

The 'myth of a postcolonial world' has never flourished in the Andes. I have argued elsewhere that the distinction between colonialism (understood as 'classic' colonialism, characterised by the presence of a foreign colonial administration) and coloniality (understood as the colonial nature of the present world order, characterised by US hegemony and an exploitative capitalist system) is far from obvious from an Aymara perspective.[58] To my Aymara interlocutors, colonialism is not something that ended with the foundation of the Republic of Bolivia in 1825, but rather a process that is intimately interlaced with modernity and the national Bolivian project. To understand this is crucial for grasping the issues discussed in this article since one of

[58] On colonialism and coloniality, see Aníbal Quijano, 'La colonialidad del poder y la experiencia cultural latinoamericana', in Roberto Briceño-Leon and Heinz Sonntag (eds.), *Pueblo, época y desarrollo: la sociología de América Latina* (Caracas: Nueva Sociedad, 1998), pp. 139–55; Ramón Grosfoguel, 'A Decolonial Approach to Political Economy: Transmodernity, Border Thinking and Global Coloniality', *Kult*, 6 (2009), Special Issue: 'Epistemologies of Transformation: The Latin American Decolonial Option and its Ramifications', pp. 10–38. For my argument, see Burman, 'Colonialism in Context'.

the fundamental questions in the debate on indigenous gender notions and the process of decolonisation is how the historical relationship between the subordination of women and colonialism is perceived. Moreover, the relationship between decolonisation and what one might term 'depatriarchalisation' depends on how one understands the reach of colonialism. I have identified five different positions.

Firstly, there is chachawarmi as a cosmic order, a social reality and a socio-political practice that is alive and well today and has been since pre-colonial times. Consequently, colonialism has not affected chachawarmi, or has affected it only superficially in the sense that it has turned into a more clandestine indigenous practice. There is consequently no need for a process of decolonisation of Aymara gender relations. Secondly, there is the position that chachawarmi exists as a social and cosmological reality and a socio-political practice since pre-colonial times, but that colonialism and male dominance have eroded it somewhat in human society. Decolonisation would more or less automatically result in restoring chachawarmi as a pre-colonial value and practice along with other indigenous values and practices. The third position holds that chachawarmi exists as a social reality and a socio-political practice in human society since pre-colonial times, but that it currently is found only at the household level or in certain remote 'traditional' ayllus, and even then only rarely. Colonialism and male dominance have eroded chachawarmi considerably. In the words of one male Aymara activist, 'They [the colonialists] even got at chachawarmi'. Decolonisation would have to take seriously the question of chachawarmi, but the fundamental problem is colonialism, and the solution to the subordination of women would be decolonisation. Interestingly, the majority of my male interlocutors considered themselves to be colonised in this sense – that is, they considered themselves to be machistas and in need of internal decolonisation, or as one said, 'That's why we want to decolonise … Otherwise … why should we talk about decolonisation?'

Fourthly, there is the position articulated by 'communitarian feminists' in the national gender equality plan and by some non-indigenous middle-class advocates for gender equality (although their notions differ quite drastically in most other respects) that chachawarmi as a social reality is an ideological notion (in the sense of covering up social injustices) which serves the indigenous 'patriarchy' and deceives indigenous women. They argue that there is no proof of chachawarmi as a socio-political practice in the pre-colonial past; rather, patriarchal structures and the institutionalised subordination and silencing of women seem to have been just as inherent in pre-colonial cultures as in contemporary society. Chachawarmi could perhaps be promising as a 'creative anticipation', however, since it projects an ideal of symmetric gender relations. Patriarchy is here given a higher explicatory value than

colonialism, since colonialism is held to be part of patriarchy and not the other way around as most of my interlocutors would have it. Consequently, there is no decolonisation without depatriarchalisation. Moreover, there is a risk that the process of decolonisation as implemented by the Indianista-Katarista movement and the Morales administration ends up concealing patriarchy by favouring colonialism as an explanatory frame and decolonisation as appropriate political measure.

The fifth position, held by the Bolivian anarcho-feminist movement, is that chachawarmi cements gendered asymmetries of power and stereotypes since it implies the notion of complementarity between women and men. To respect and cherish the female part of this 'complementary relationship' is not equivalent to emancipation, as it does not question the idea that there is such a thing as a female part with certain female qualities and tasks to perform. Chachawarmi has served patriarchal purposes since time immemorial; moreover, the concept has a profound heterosexual bias. Consequently, there is no emancipatory potential whatsoever in the concept of chachawarmi, and all expressions of 'tradition' should be forcefully rejected. Here, colonialism loses all its explicatory value and surrenders entirely to patriarchy.

Conclusion

To understand the cultural and political dynamics at work in the subordination and silencing of women in the Bolivian Andes, there is little virtue in a romanticised and idealistic view of indigenous social and political life. However, a cynical approach would be even more infertile, theoretically and politically. Rather, one might move beyond preconceived notions – of 'patriarchy' or of 'complementarity', for instance – and try to address and take seriously social and political processes as they are experienced, lived through, resisted, catalysed and explained by women and men.

The debate in Bolivia today is not so much about whether or not women are subordinated and silenced in contemporary Aymara society, but about the causes and possible solutions to this subordination. The great majority of my interlocutors would agree with Boaventura de Sousa Santos' affirmation that 'the struggle for equality is also a struggle for the recognition of difference'.[59] This affirmation is valid in a general sense not only for indigenous peoples' struggles with the state and dominant non-indigenous sectors of society, but also for indigenous women's struggle against the subordination of women. In other words, and in line with Maria Lugones' ideas on the

[59] Boaventura de Suosa Santos, *Pensar el Estado y la sociedad: desafíos actuales* (La Paz: CLACSO, CIDES-UMSA, Muela del Diablo, Comuna, 2008), p. 147.

coloniality of gender, indigenous women's struggle for equality parts from the recognition that their experiences of subordination are different from those of 'white bourgeois women' since indigenous women experience discrimination at the intersection of race, ethnicity, class and gender in a way that 'white bourgeois women' do not. Consequently, in the ethnopolitically charged context of contemporary Bolivia as addressed in this article, the analyses that female Aymara activists make of their subordinated position in society tend to differ from those of non-indigenous middle-class women and radical feminists in the sense that female Aymara activists tend to equate the subordination of women with colonialism and therefore tend to see an unambiguous emancipatory potential in decolonisation. The great majority of the Aymara women with whom I have discussed this matter would subscribe to Silvia Rivera's claim that there is 'a need for a simultaneous effort of cultural and gender decolonisation'.[60] Many of them would also agree with the graffiti in a tunnel in central La Paz which states: '¡No hay descolonización sin despatriarcalización!' ('There is no decolonisation without depatriarchalisation!') If they had a spray can to hand, however, I believe they would add 'and vice versa'.

To not recognise the value and significance of the readings of reality that these women (and men) make would not only lend proof to colonial arrogance but would also run the risk of facilitating the 'continuation of orientalism, cultural imperialism and the maintenance of the view that women are acted upon and are rarely the actors'.[61] Denise Arnold once said that 'one mustn't confuse strategies for change with reality'.[62] Chachawarmi, in this sense, should not be understood as a plain reflection of reality but rather as a *strategy for change* within a process of decolonisation; a strategy that parts from notions of a pre-colonial past in which women and men were 'equal but different'. In this sense, there would be an unquestionable emancipatory potential in chachawarmi: the disclosure of horizons beyond the colonial subordination and silencing of indigenous women. Chachawarmi is not inherently a concealing *or* an emancipatory concept, however. As with all concepts, Aymara concepts may be used for colonial as well as decolonial purposes, in order to conceal as well as to reveal the breach between cultural ideals and social reality. The connotations and functions of chachawarmi depend on context, on who uses the idea, where, when, in what way and for which purposes. Its meanings and implications, then, are disputed and will most probably continue to be so. The same goes for the meanings and implications of 'decolonisation'.

[60] Rivera, 'La noción de derecho'. [61] McKerl, 'Multiculturalism', p. 189.
[62] Reunión Anual de Etnología, MUSEF, La Paz, 21 Aug. 2009.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Este artículo se refiere a la 'colonialidad del género' relacionada con nociones rearticuladas aymaras de género en la Bolivia contemporánea. Mientras que activistas indígenas femeninas tienden a relacionar la subordinación de las mujeres con el colonialismo y a ver un potencial emancipatorio en el actual proceso de descolonización, existen también defensoras de la clase media por la igualdad de género y activistas feministas que parecen temer que las 'políticas descolonizadoras' de la administración de Evo Morales abandonen a las mujeres indígenas a su silenciada subordinación 'tradicional' al interior de estructuras dominadas por hombres. Desde las dinámicas de las proyecciones descoloniales indígenas, críticas feministas, dudas de la clase media y políticas estatales, este artículo explora las implicaciones de estos diferentes discursos sobre el colonialismo, la descolonización y la subordinación de las mujeres.

Spanish keywords: colonialidad del género, subordinación femenina, colonialismo, descolonización, *chachawarmi*, aymara, Bolivia

Portuguese abstract. O artigo aborda a 'colonialidade do gênero' em relação às noções de gênero indígena aimará rearticuladas na Bolívia contemporânea. Enquanto ativistas indígenas tendem a relacionar a subordinação das mulheres ao colonialismo e vislumbram o potencial emancipatório do atual processo de descolonização, há defensoras da igualidade entre os gêneros da classe média que parecem temer que as 'políticas descolonizatórias' da administração de Evo Morales abandonarão mulheres indígenas à silenciosa subordinação 'tradicional' no contexto de estruturas dominadas por homens. Exploram-se as implicações dos diferentes discursos acerca do colonialismo, descolonização e subordinação das mulheres à partir das dinâmicas das projeções indígenas descolonizadas, das críticas feministas, dos receios da classe média e das políticas de estado.

Portuguese keywords: colonialidade do gênero, subordinação feminina, colonialismo, descolonização, *chachawarmi*, aimará, Bolívia