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**UNIVERSITY**  
*of*  
**GLASGOW**

**Opposing the Neoliberal Behemoth: Deducing the nature of Bolivia's politically active indigenous women; the construction of a post-neoliberal 'feminist' epistemology?**

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## Abstract

This Dissertation constructs a Marxist-feminist ideological analysis of indigenous women's activism in Bolivia. Practicing feminist standpoint methodology, I explore how a subjugated perspective of indigenous women can expose the myopias of neoliberalism, and liberal feminism. A legacy of macro-economic restructuring through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) lauded by international institutions such as the World Bank and IMF it resulted in economic and culturally destructive consequences. I discuss how this fostered a reactionary indigenous 'neoliberalist' movement against, which seeks to re-imagine the trajectory of globalization, proposing a more holistic and culturally diverse conception of development. It questions the legitimacy of hegemonic neoliberalism internationally. This dissertation researches *women's* activism in this movement for change. Through case-study research, and detailed analysis practicing feminist standpoint methodology, I explore the pluriethnic and holistic development trajectory they propose. In so doing, I reflect upon the enriched and deepened feminist discourses one can engender through their 'hybrid' narratives, which selectively adopt and adapt elements of liberal feminism to tackle discriminations within their cultures.

## 1. Introduction

It remains a challenge to find a language to speak about, and rethink neoliberal development in an era of globalisation... There is a dominant discourse and too often we speak from inside that discourse.<sup>1</sup>

The Oxford English Dictionary of Politics characterises neoliberalism as a modified form of traditional liberalism. It champions free market capitalism and the rights of the individual. In the developing world “it is often linked to the so-called ‘Washington Consensus’ (privatization and deregulation; trade and financial liberalization; shrinking the role of the state; encouraging foreign direct investment) and to the structural adjustment programmes promoted by the IMF and World Bank.”<sup>2</sup> It drives market integration and the dismantling of state-directed economies coupled with a new globally homogeneous consumer culture. However this definition is limited and, for the purposes of this essay ‘neoliberalism’ should be understood as an ideological and sociological force which fundamentally restructures societal relations within its jurisdiction.

This dissertation re-considers neoliberal ubiquity. My research is directed by my concern over the contemporary trajectory of international development, specifically its unquestioning assumption that ‘developing nations’ must emulate the Global North. This paper identifies neoliberal sentiments as culturally destructive in their blinkered economic comprehension of progress. The market is the orthodox unit of advancement, and quantitative statistical analysis dictates development initiatives. My aim is to unearth the hostility of neoliberalism through the subjective viewpoints of the marginalized; namely, politically active indigenous women. Through this perspective the tainted myopias of hegemonic international development can be identified with a view to constructing an alternative development discourse, placing emphasis on the hitherto subjugated “human face.”<sup>3</sup> This dissertation opens with a quotation from Hester Eisenstein, whose work has significantly influenced this research:

Between capitalist modernity and patriarchal traditionalism, we can think of a third option, which would represent community autonomy and self-determination, where people are free to choose what elements of tradition and what elements of modernity

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<sup>1</sup> A. Lind, ‘Making Feminist Sense of Neoliberalism: The Institutionalisation of Women’s Struggles in Ecuador and Bolivia,’ *Journal of Developing Societies*, Vol.18, (2002) p.228.

<sup>2</sup> I. Mclean, A. McMillan, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

will make up their own vision of the future. In this project those cultures that were ravaged by colonialism can look back into their own past to resurrect the elements of women's autonomy that were suppressed or destroyed by colonial regimes.<sup>4</sup>

My research illustrates the existence of a civilian moment for change. Alternatives to its hegemonic dichotomy *are* possible and fomenting within indigenous communities. I illustrate that more holistic, less culturally destructive forms of development are being proposed by the “neostructuralist” indigenous movement escalating in Bolivia<sup>5</sup>. As Fontana notes, the value of the Bolivian indigenous movement is its ability to “show the limits of the neoliberal paradigm that considers the human being a *homo economicus*... [placing] old teleologies in doubt and challenging the complexities of modern society.”<sup>6</sup>

I provide a Marxist-feminist scrutiny of neoliberalism by practicing feminist standpoint methodology. Feminist standpoint is an academic discipline which appropriates subjugated viewpoints to critically consider dominant homogenous teleological systems, with particular value in its acknowledgment of the myriad discriminations women experience. I research how Bolivian indigenous women are organising themselves through communities, national organisations and the wider indigenous movement to shape a substitute narrative to neoliberal hegemony.

Using this research, I present a second argument predicated upon the literature of Hester Eisenstein and Nancy Fraser: indigenous women are creating a conceptual space from which to unearth the uncomfortable truth that liberal feminism has become tangled up with the seductive corporate capitalist agenda of neoliberalism. Indigenous women construct a new female consciousness which transcends liberal feminist teleology. I explore the hybrid narratives indigenous Bolivian women are nurturing, bridging the two ideological positions. Selectively incorporating aspects of both liberal and indigenous teleologies, they engender a ‘third’ way: opposing the neoliberal behemoth but simultaneously contesting the discrimination they experience as women within their cultures. In sum, I argue their unique sociological positioning fabricates the notion that alternative developmental trajectories exist, and in doing so, this epistemology deepens feminist consciousness.

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<sup>4</sup> H. Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women's Labour and Ideas to Exploit the World*, (London: Penguin, 2009), p.222.

<sup>5</sup> F. Leiva, ‘Toward a Critique of Latin American Neostructuralism.’ *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 50, No.4, (2008).

<sup>6</sup> L. Fontana, ‘On the Perils and Potentialities of Revolution: Conflict and Collective Action in Contemporary Bolivia’, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 40, No.3 (2013) p, 39.

My literature review establishes the parameters of this thesis. It theoretically and historically contextualises my argument and frames the problematic: how the indoctrination of neoliberalism in the form of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) exacerbated poverty and was destructive to indigenous communities. Following this, I analyse how a legacy of neoliberal economic reforms unintentionally catalysed a politicised indigenous *women's* identity. Finally, I will consider the temperament of Bolivia's movement for change, critically considering the ideology of the current governing party the Movimiento al Socialismo Party (Movement Toward Socialism – MAS) led by indigenous leader Evo Morales. While indigenous neostructuralism endorses modernisation, the teleology advocates a holistic, environmentally sensitive and communal conception of development. In an epoch of environmental uncertainty this is never been more relevant. I support this argument through case-study analysis of the gendered implications of 'Water Wars' of Cochabamba, and research two indigenous women's organisations (one local, one national).

To disclose, it is important to note that my research was limited by my inability to translate important academic papers, and access to micro level local women's organisations was difficult due to their scarce public profile within Bolivia, let alone the UK. Nonetheless, my research is sufficient to demonstrate my argument and justify further research.

## 2. Theoretical Context and Methodology

This dissertation is ideologically positioned in relation to the theses of Eisenstein and Fraser. Their Marxist-feminist critiques which questions the appropriateness of internationally dominant liberal feminism and gender-tailored development initiatives, establishes the ideological foundation of this research. Building upon this, I identify the framework of feminist standpoint. Haraway explores how subjugated knowledges offer a unique platform from which to critique dominant ontologies. This justifies the argument I intend to make: that an indigenous perspective represents a historically overlooked viewpoint to critique neoliberalism. Applying the critical lens of feminist standpoint to the research of Eisenstein and Fraser, I present my associated argument, that indigenous ‘feminisms’ present a self-reflective perspective to unveil and untangle Western liberal feminism from neoliberal values.

I demonstrate that indigenous women’s standpoint contests neoliberalism by reviewing international gender-orientated initiatives with a skeptical hostility. This is predicated on the tension between individualistic neoliberal ideology and the more holistic community-orientated values of indigenous communities. They demand a narrative of globalised development in which “the economy must be at the service of human beings, not human beings at the service of the economy.”<sup>7</sup>

### 2.1 A WOLF IN SHEEP’S CLOTHING: EXORCISING THE MYOPIAS OF LIBERAL FEMINISM

Neoliberalism dominates the international agenda resulting in complex, culturally destructive consequences for oppositional teleologies which refuse to adopt its tenets. Referring to the research of Eisenstein and Fraser, I assert that the standpoint of indigenous Bolivian women is a conceptual space from which to scrutinise neoliberal development initiatives. Although Eisenstein and Fraser’s predominantly focus on Western liberal feminism, their theoretical arguments are sufficiently universal and can be applied to my dissertation.

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<sup>7</sup> N. López (ed.) Creating a caring Economy: Nora Castañeda and the Women’s Development Bank of Venezuela. (Crossroad Books, 2006), p.54.



Eisenstein's Feminism Seduced raises “troubling issues about how feminist energies, ideologies, and activism have been manipulated in the service of the dangerous forces of globalised corporate capitalism.”<sup>8</sup> In the process of selling globalisation, corporate leaders and elites are embracing ‘empowerment’ rhetoric to perpetuate economic-directed ‘progress.’ Eisenstein and Fraser critically consider how women have poured into the global labour markets, spuriously preaching ‘women’s empowerment’ and ‘economic emancipation.’ They explore the ways in which neoliberal ideologies have discreetly ricocheted into the Global South through the discourse of ‘development,’ usurping state-directed economic steering in favour of entrepreneurial market liberation and cheap (female) labour<sup>9</sup>. Eisenstein discusses how the “propaganda of globalisation has mesmerized us; making us feel that the only real engine of women’s liberation is the expansion of corporate capitalism to every corner of the globe.”<sup>10</sup> Naming this feminism’s “uncanny double,” Fraser raises the idea that capitalism re-makes itself at times of historical rupture by “recuperating strands of critique made against it.”<sup>11</sup> Neoliberalism has manipulated the rhetoric of international feminism to further its economic agenda.

Their writings expose the ‘cunning’ ways in which capitalism has co-opted social movements which question its legitimacy. It assimilates their ideas and rhetoric to enhance profitably while dispelling the radical features of these movements. Fraser’s article critiques American second-wave feminism for failing to fully dismantle the institutions upon which capitalism was predicated. Rather than contesting fundamental patriarchal capitalist structures, women instead assimilated themselves to fit the paradigm by joining the workforce, and preaching gender equality and female economic emancipation. Both Eisenstein and Fraser raise the concern that the international feminist movement works blindly and contentedly within a neoliberal archetype. In sum, capitalism uncannily dispels movements which question its legitimacy by manipulating and assuming its rhetoric. Liberal feminism has been seduced by the charming dialect of free-market capitalism, and finds itself tangled within its structures.

I adapt Eisenstein and Fraser’s western-centric analysis to examine the anti-neoliberal temperament of Bolivia’s women’s movement. Developing their argument, I illustrate how

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<sup>8</sup> Eisenstein, preface vii.

<sup>9</sup> N. Fraser, ‘Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History’, New Left Review, Vol. 56, (2009) p.107.

<sup>10</sup> Eisenstein, p. 200.

<sup>11</sup> Fraser, p.114., and p.109.

indigenous Bolivian women question the legitimacy of neoliberal orthodoxy. Their antithetical culture comprises a platform from which to expose the pluriethnically destructive ramifications of neoliberal ideology. I draw on feminist standpoint to extend the scope of their research. This subjugated viewpoint criticises the economic preoccupation and cultural coercion which characterises global development initiatives. This enriches feminist knowledge by presenting an alternative, holistic development discourse. Nonetheless it is essential not to generalise nor sensationalise this standpoint, and to recognise the complexity of multiple praxis of discrimination experienced by indigenous women within their cultures.

## 2. 2 SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGES: FEMINIST STANDPOINT METHODOLOGY

I now justify my use of Feminist Standpoint methodology, arguing that in spite of criticisms regarding standpoint as academically outdated and associated with problematic binaries, it is suited to my research. Donna Haraway states:

We seek those ruled by partial sight and limited voice- not partiality for its own sake but, rather, for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible. Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals.<sup>12</sup>

Indigenous ‘feminisms’ expose the myopias of liberal feminist and neoliberal paradigms. As Stéphanie Rousseau’s article asserts, Bolivia’s indigenous women are often subject of multiple discrimination such as racism, high levels of illiteracy, transnational attacks on their indigenous territories, domestic and state violence and exploitative labour.<sup>13</sup> Neoliberal reforms and globalisation has transformed gender relations in indigenous communities as will be shown, with both harmful and progressive repercussions. Those who have experienced the ramifications of the neoliberal agenda are best placed to criticize as societally detrimental its regime. This observation forms a cornerstone of my research.

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<sup>12</sup> D.Haraway, ‘Situated knowledge’s: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,’ *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, (1988), p. 590.

<sup>13</sup> S.Rousseau, ‘Indigenous and Feminist Movements at The Constituent Assembly In Bolivia: Locating the Representation of Indigenous Women’, *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 46, No.2, (2011), p. 9.

Rousseau discusses the social marginalisation indigenous women experience in Bolivia, exploring how this endows them with a unique perspective to question the status quo:

The challenge indigenous women bring forward is that of a critique of capitalist individualism, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism, together with a critique of sexism and racism. Indigenous women's movements thus contribute to debate within and across feminist and other women's movements by proposing a new form of radicalism.<sup>14</sup>

Rousseau's articulates the multiple axis of discrimination Bolivian indigenous women experience, and therefore the value of their viewpoint. However it is important to recognise that her register is problematically sensationalist. To surmise, the above have highlighted the multifaceted social discriminations experienced by indigenous women, justifying my inclusion of standpoint.

### 2.3 CAUTIONARY REFLECTIONS

The limitations of standpoint methodology ought to be observed. 'Subjugation,' essential for constructing standpoint narratives, inherently assumes a hierarchy of knowledges. This consolidates binaries and privileges dominant hegemonic constructs, designating contending narratives 'Other.' Alternative platforms of analysis from 'below,' carry the risk of essentialism, disacknowledgement of social context and miscomprehension of experiences. Haraway recognises that there is:

good reason to believe vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful [...] there also lies a serious danger of romanticizing and/ or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions.<sup>15</sup>

Assimilating a standpoint from marginalized demographics is potentially problematic. I observe that standpoint insufficiently transcends the dominant international agenda which assumes neoliberal supremacy. In attempting to provide an alternative perspective to neoliberalism, 'standpoint' paradoxically locates itself within a binary constructed by the same system it is seeking to replace. This echoes Eisenstein's and Fraser's arguments that

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<sup>14</sup> Rousseau, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Haraway, p.584.

liberal feminism in its attempts to dismantle patriarchal capitalism, systematically falls short, subsuming itself into it.

This prompts me to demonstrate an awareness of the problematics of essentialism and assigning voices. It is impossible to generalise about the ‘interests of indigenous women’ for their individual experiences are infinitely unique. Identity is multifaceted and complex. Moreover, it is imperative to acknowledge my positioning with regards to standpoint. As noted by Dorothy Smith, we are all participants, “we discover ourselves in exploring the relations in which we participate and that shapes how we participate.”<sup>16</sup> I iterate that I am neither Bolivian nor indigenous. The aim of this dissertation therefore is to raise awareness of indigenous women’s activism in Bolivia, and draw attention to how their ideologies and values, disparate to typical Northern Hemispheric ones, are useful to critically consider both liberal feminism and neoliberalism.

Nonetheless, where standpoint is particularly relevant to my research is its engagement with multiple axes of discrimination, acknowledging that the situated knowledges of the subjugated are not “innocent” positions.<sup>17</sup> While the indigenous women’s perspective can unearth discriminatory truths associated with neoliberalism, it should not eclipse the discrimination ensued within indigenous communities themselves. Moreover, as will be demonstrated in my case studies, the interests Bolivian indigenous women have as an organised group are similarly shaped in multiple and conflicting ways. This is useful for articulating my notion of tailoring an ideological ‘hybridity’. Whilst engaging with these shortfalls however, “subjugated” standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world.<sup>18</sup>

Haraway therefore heeds caution of essentialising and romanticising situated knowledges. It is easy to manipulate ‘subjugation’, using it as a canvas to paint one’s romanticised conclusions, failing to engage with the layered and complex relations of indigenous women within their own cultures, which also uphold discriminative customs. After establishing this context and working within this theoretical paradigm I will now architect and validate my argument; that indigenous Bolivian women offer a unique

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<sup>16</sup> D. Smith, ‘Sociology from Women’s Experience,’ *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 10 No. 1, (1992) p. 94.

<sup>17</sup> Haraway, p.584.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

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teleological perspective to contest the current international trajectory of neoliberal hegemony, which can simultaneously be used to disentangle liberal feminism from indoctrinating such values.

### 3. Literature Review

This literature review locates the problematics I address. I use this section to contextualize and isolate my thesis, demonstrating how it will develop on the existing research of academics. I draw predominantly on the work of Molyneux and Yashar to show how a decade of neoliberal SAPs catalysed an indigenous neostructuralist movement against it. My dissertation will expand this with specific research on the currently governing political party MAS, discussing how it deflects neoliberal agendas, locating the indigenous *women's* movement within it. Following this, I incorporate the research of Robin Isserles and Sonia Alvarez to illustrate Eisenstein and Fraser's theory: how neoliberalism ricocheted into the developing world in the rhetoric of 'empowerment'. Finally, with focus on the indigenous women's movement in Bolivia, Rousseau, Hernández Castillo, and Sieder and Sierra, demonstrate my position. They highlight circumstances in which indigenous women foster a 'hybrid' development narrative.

#### 3.1 THE NEOLIBERAL HANGOVER

I contextualize my dissertation, discussing the sociological impact of SAPs and macro-austerity packages of 1985-2000. I explain how its legacy unintentionally politicised Native American, Indigenous women who were previously marginalised in public spheres. In 1985, "imposed at the gunpoint of debt," Bolivia was required to adopt Supreme Decree 21060, the Bretton Wood's New Economic Policy and an agenda of academically tailored SAPs.<sup>19</sup> Internationally pioneered by Harvard Economist Jeffrey Sachs as 'shock treatments,' it was lauded as a strategic means to stabilize Bolivia's turbulent economy, consolidate free-market democracy in Bolivia and prise open its borders to foreign trade. It was the first SAP to be 'road tested' in Latin America. Inflation raged, state-owned enterprises crumbled and poverty ensued.<sup>20</sup>

Yashar's literature argues that the implementation of SAPs catalysed the indigenous movement. Neoliberal resource-driven land reforms squeezed the rural communities in their attempts to infiltrate a system of centralized state control. This undermined their existing

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<sup>19</sup> Fraser, p.107

<sup>20</sup> R.Mayorga, 'Bolivia's Silent Revolution', *Journal of Democracy*, (1997), p.145.

customary autonomous structures.<sup>21</sup> She notes, “While neoliberal citizenship regimes did not cause indigenous mobilisation in the first place, they did subsequently catalyse *additional* mobilisation (and shaped the political agendas that emerged).”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Molyneux recalls how female collective action in pursuit of social and political goals has arisen in the context of modern-state reform and economic change.<sup>23</sup> The adjective *collective* is noteworthy. To summarise, the alienation and discrimination experienced by SAPs necessitated a politicised indigenous women’s movement.

Deere and Leon evaluate the impact of SAPs on agricultural communities. Their research articulates how indigenous community-orientated values differ from neoliberal ones. The neoliberal model “favours individual over collective land rights as more conducive to profit-maximising behaviour and economic efficiency. State farms [were] privatised and support withdrawn from production cooperatives and other group farming activities that were favoured under the previous mode.”<sup>24</sup> This again contextualises this research, emphasising the incompatibility of neoliberalism across Bolivia in rural, indigenous and agricultural communities which espouse a more holistic, sacred and communal relationship with the land. Neoliberalism championed privatisation and economic growth over the pre-existing state-owned agrarian policy. State policies had respected and affirmed the autonomy of localised judicial systems of indigenous and agricultural communities. It is important to stress however, that whilst there is indeed an indigenous movement against neoliberalism, the movement is seeking *alternative*, holistic and pluriethnic forms of modernisation, not alternatives to modernity.<sup>25</sup>

This literature demonstrates the conflict between neoliberal and indigenous ideologues, and indicates the alienating repercussions of neoliberalism upon indigenous communities. It posits my argument that capitalist SAPs antagonised a movement for change, and consequently indigenous movement today prioritises anti-neoliberal sentiments.

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<sup>21</sup> D. Yashar, ‘Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge,’ (Cambridge university press, 2005), p.66-67.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> M. Molyneux, Women’s movements in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> C.Deere, and M. Leon, ‘Institutional Reform of Agriculture under Neoliberalism: The Impact of the Women’s and Indigenous Movements,’ Latin American Research Review, Vol. 36, No.2 (2001), p.34.

<sup>25</sup> J. Wolff, ‘Towards Post-Liberal Democracy in Latin America? A Conceptual Framework Applied to Bolivia,’ Journal of Latin American Studies, Vol. 45, No. 1, (2013), p.32.

### 3.2 THE 1990s NGO 'BOOM'

Illustrating the theoretical narrative of Eisenstein and Fraser, Isserles and Alvarez's articles reveal the obscured capitalist, economic agenda dominating 'development' initiatives. They consider the discreet avenues in which neoliberalism has permeated into Bolivian society through the semblance of 'female empowerment'. With their differential cultural teleology, indigenous rural communities were often less 'penetrable' to the neoliberal paradigm. As discussed, the aftermath of structural adjustment stripped Bolivia of social institutions and poverty ensued. Consequently, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and International NGOs (INGOs) stepped in to alleviate the social effects of the fiscal policies. Alvarez's paper recalls how they marginalised indigenous grass-roots organisations from political spheres, for international funding favoured development initiatives that reduced 'development' to economic enterprise. The New Policy Agenda implemented across Latin America sought to reduce poverty through gender-focused development initiatives "[viewing] poor women's integration into the market as crucial to neoliberal 'development'. Gender came to be seen as a key 'technical dimension' of state efforts to ameliorate the negative fallout of SAPs and to contain social discontent."<sup>26</sup> The dislocated characteristic of the international women's NGO movement "is that it builds its demands on the principles of UN conventions, rather than on a dialogue with Bolivian women about their needs."<sup>27</sup>

Isserles' paper likewise embodies Eisenstein and Fraser's sentiment. She deconstructs the subtle neoliberal agenda of microcredit schemes; a development initiative applauded as a means to alleviate poverty by independent entrepreneurial initiatives. She notes how:

In this conception of development and progress, the market is the answer, and self-reliance is the idealised objective... Poverty is thus treated as temporary, remedied by simply improving cash flow.<sup>28</sup>

Isserles condones micro-credit's strong ideological attachment to neoliberalism. "The market is the panacea for economic and social development."<sup>29</sup> Development initiatives advocating

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<sup>26</sup>S. Alvarez, 'Advocating Feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO Boom'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, (1999) 1:2 p.191.

<sup>27</sup> K.Monasterios 'Bolivian Women's organisations in the MAS Era', *nacla* (2004), available at: <https://nacla.org/news/bolivian-women%E2%80%99s-organisations-mas-era>

<sup>28</sup> R.Isserles, 'Microcredit: The Rhetoric of Empowerment, the Reality of "Development As Usual', *Woman's Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No.3, p.44.

<sup>29</sup> Á.Bastian Duarte, 'From the Margins of Latin American Feminism: Indigenous and Lesbian Feminisms', *Signs*, Vol. 38. No. 1 (2012), p. 157.



‘self-reliance’ parallels a Western-driven bias of the neoliberal economic standard. Appropriating this discourse I justify the position that Bolivia’s indigenous women’s movement is unreservedly anti-neoliberal for their cultural values (whether nostalgic or otherwise) are alienated from this ideology. Thus, in accordance with Eisenstein, I lay the premise of my argument that they can resurrect from their cultural heritage aspects to contest this trajectory of development.

### 3.3 THE BOLIVIAN INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT FOR SOCIALISM

I now consider the wider indigenous movement within Bolivia. As argued by Nancy Postero, the agenda of the Morales government “is not only about moving towards post-neoliberalism, but also about transforming, or ‘vernacularising’, liberalism.”<sup>30</sup> Neoliberalism re-defines globalisation with a culturally sensitive aesthetic, so that it reflects the values of those upon which it is mediated. The constitutional reform of 2009 demonstrates the aforementioned sentiments. One only need look at the title page of; Bolivia (Plurinational state of)’s Constitution<sup>31</sup> to gauge the importance of acknowledging diversity of cultures and notions of multiple identities. Hammond’s research evaluates the dual legal framework in Bolivia. This complementary judicial system exemplifies how Morales’ government challenges prescribed neoliberal assumption of centralized state autonomy. In Bolivia, they recognise individuals’ rights as citizens but also legally vindicate collective rights and community autonomy at local levels.<sup>32</sup> Hammond recalls how developmental governments under the neoliberal regime sought to organise the indigenous population from above on a non-ethnic basis, conclusively identifying them as peasants and treating them as a homogenous social class. The assumption “that the dominant culture is superior and that the indigenous population should be assimilated to it went unquestioned.”<sup>33</sup>

While this is true, it is important to refrain from overstating the identity of the MAS. Within any radical social movement, constructing a unified oppositional-identity is integral. However, this is achieved by defining a consolidated collective identity, forfeiting the most

<sup>30</sup> N.Postero (2010) cited in, Wolff, p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> Bolivia (Plurinational State of)’s Constitution, (2009), available at: [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Bolivia\\_2009.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Bolivia_2009.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> J.Hammond, ‘Indigenous Community Justice in the Bolivian Constitution of 2009’ Human Rights Quarterly, (2011), Vol. 33, p.650.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

marginalised identities for strategic measures. Within ‘marginalised’ groups there are inevitably sub-groups on the peripheries, whose viewpoints may become overlooked; such was the case for many women. This brings me to raise the pressing and nebulous question of identity. Although Morales is indigenous, he is from the Aymara, subsistent farming region which is one of the largest collective indigenous identities. Whilst sixty two percent of Bolivians identify themselves as indigenous, there are thirty-six ethnically and linguistically distinct groups, which, due to geographic, climate and agricultural variations, have very distinctive and different lifestyles and cultures.<sup>34</sup> For instance, concentrated in the highlands, the Quechua (30 per cent of the total population) and the Aymara (25 per cent) comprise mostly agricultural communities. They have a markedly different experience to the far smaller remaining groups, mostly in the lowlands.<sup>35</sup> One must be cautious to address the complexities of assuming the standpoint of ‘indigeneity’ recognising it as nebulous and abstract. Nonetheless, this literature is imperative for strengthening my neostructuralist proposition. The MAS party prioritises constructing diverse and pluriethnic dialogues beyond the conviction of hegemonic neoliberal ontology.

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<sup>34</sup> Hammond, p.652.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.4 ARCHITECTING HYBRID 'FEMINIST' EPISTEMOLOGIES

I now consider some of the ways that Indigenous women are constructing hybrid narratives, 'cherry-picking' between the divergent ideological positions of indigeneity and liberalism. This hybridity selectively rejects culturally injurious aspects of the neoliberal agenda, whilst incorporating and assimilating the UN conception of human rights to advances indigenous women's civil rights. This is sculpting a culturally complex feminist discourse. Traditionally, indigenous cultures prioritise community over the individual, perceiving relationships of gender as relations of *duality*. One could argue that patriarchy and machismo culture (a *conquistador's* ideology "among men [and women] that puts an exaggerated emphasis on masculine power and virility") is an inherited colonial conception previously exempt from indigenous custom.<sup>36</sup> The Memoirs of the First Summit of indigenous Women in the Americas implies this, identifying tenements of indigenous epistemology. As noted by Hernández Castillo, in contrast to the stark individualism promoted by globalised capitalism indigenous women reclaim the value of "*Community*" they understand this term as a life in which people are intimately linked to their social and environmental surroundings. This advocates notions of deference and equality, nobody is superior to anybody.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, traditional indigenous custom values "*Respect*" in the sense of respectful attitudes to elders, and deference that extends to all beings and nature. "The Earth is seen as a woman, Mother and Teacher that conceives the sustenance of all beings."<sup>38</sup> Finally, and most importantly to this dissertation,

"In contrast to the superiority of the masculine over the feminine, which is claimed by patriarchal ideologies, they propose *Duality or Dualism*: in which the feminine and the masculine in a same deity are two energy forces found in one which permits the balance of vision and action. They represent the integrity of everything that guides us toward complementarity. By considering the Supreme as dual, father and mother, one can act with gender equity."<sup>39</sup>

This quotation is important. It indicates the manner in which indigenous women seek to resurrect traditional concepts of gender equity to contest the notion of capitalist patriarchy. This envisions harmonious, equal relations between men and women which transcends neoliberal consciousness. As noted by Alma Lopez, a self-proclaimed indigenous feminist,

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<sup>36</sup> J. Ward, *Latin American Development and Conflict since 1945*, (Routledge, Oxford, 1997), p. 115.

<sup>37</sup> R. Hernández Castillo, 'Comparative Perspectives Symposium: Indigenous Feminisms, The Emergence of Indigenous Feminism in Latin America', *Signs* Vol. 34, (2010) p.540.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

such Mayan principles currently don't exist and that stating the contrary is 'turning a blind eye' to the oppression that indigenous women suffer.<sup>40</sup> It is her intention however, to recover from her culture equality and complementarity and values of community that have dissipated with the infiltration of neoliberalism. Regardless of whether such philosophical principles are out-dated nostalgic sentiments, they nonetheless generate a refreshing lens for re-envisioning society; blending elements of both cultures to further the agency of women.

Hernández Castillo similarly recalls that traditional indigenous notions of personhood "transcend Western individualism... It considers what constitutes a dignified life through a different understanding of people's relationship to property and to nature than the one liberal individualism provides."<sup>41</sup> Bastian Duarte likewise echoes this sentiment. She notes that Indigenous feminist activities are contributing to a 'culturally distinct agenda' which pushes against the prescribed and hegemonic framework of liberal feminism. She highlights how neoliberalism assumes concepts and methodologies far removed from the reality of indigenous communities.<sup>42</sup> Indigenous feminisms ascertain that liberal feminism responds "to the needs of white or mestizo (mixed race) urban upper-and middle-class women, and not to the realities of indigenous women."<sup>43</sup> It is on such grounds that I will illustrate how the voice of indigenous women can direct a self-reflective invaluable alternative to the current socially toxic system of neoliberalism that prioritises the individual, often at the cost of recognising the holistic value of solidarity and community.

Seider and Sierra's research also exemplifies this conception of complementarity. They analyse how a duality of justice systems (state and local) has strengthened indigenous women's agency to secure legal redress. They termed this "forum shopping" in which indigenous women sought recourse from a combination of communal authorities, and state justice institutions.<sup>44</sup> They noted the 'novel way' indigenous women who feel their local community judiciary has inappropriately judged or disacknowledged their claims, are able to invoke "international human rights and concepts of gender rights and gender parity in order to challenge inequitable power relations within their own communities, as well as within

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<sup>40</sup> A. López cited by R. Hernández Castillo, p.539.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 540-541.

<sup>42</sup> Á.Bastian Duarde, p. 160.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>44</sup> R. Sierder and M. Sierra, 'Indigenous Women's Access to Justice in Latin America' Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI Working Paper) (2010), p.8

society at large”<sup>45</sup>. Again this exemplifies the notion that indigenous women are constructing a hybrid composition of rights which summons both individual and communal sentiments.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.5 EVOLUTION OF A BOLIVIAN NEOSTRUCTURALIST 'FEMINISM'?

I close this literature review, adapting feminist standpoint to critically review the evolution of Bolivia's indigenous women's movement. Rousseau recalls an interview with Martha Sánchez Néstor: "although some indigenous women like herself perceive themselves as feminists, most indigenous women still largely associate feminism with mestizo, middle-class movements."<sup>46</sup> Néstor demonstrates the inappropriate tendencies of feminist discourse. This polarization is summarised by Monasterios who recalls that:

throughout the 1990s, the Bolivian women's movement was ideologically polarized between a liberal, NGO-based "gender technocracy" and the anarcho-feminism embodied in the Mujeres Creando (Women Creating) movement. Between them stood the great majority of the country's female population—a huge contingent of women of indigenous descent.<sup>47</sup>

Evidently, many indigenous women's organisations distance themselves from prescribed Western conceptions of feminism. This is on the basis that liberal feminism perpetuates neoliberal values vying with those of their communities. Some indigenous female constituents that Rousseau interviewed:

criticised feminist NGOs openly. They accused them of receiving wealth of money flowing from foreign sources, of defending an ideology that pitted women against men rather than recognising each gender's contribution to society, and they reported feeling used by feminist NGOs as clientele.<sup>48</sup>

This is tantamount to establishing and refining the ideological positioning of this dissertation research, understanding my cultural positioning within it. It is essential to recognise the problematic: that the construction of 'feminism' has the potential to become ideologically polarising and perpetuate static binaries. This prompts me again to engage with the nebulous nature of identity and to recognize my relative position within the standpoint I am assuming. I am cautious in my proceeding chapter not to misconstrue the narratives in my case study analysis. In consideration of the issues raised in this literature review, I now introduce my case-study analysis.

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<sup>46</sup> Rousseau, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Monasterios, available at: <https://nacla.org/news/bolivian-women%E2%80%99s-organisations-mas-era>

<sup>48</sup> Rousseau, p. 14.

#### 4. How Indigenous Bolivian Women are Organising Themselves

The attempt of authoritarian regimes... to redefine the limits of legitimacy of political action contributed paradoxically to the politicization of spheres traditionally considered non-political. The phenomenon has been particularly clear in the case of women, who in various cases organised themselves in new ways having recognised the political profile of their family roles... forming social movements that question the traditional way of engaging in politics, the relation between politics and social life, and the very nature of social relationships.<sup>49</sup>

This chapter considers some of the ways that indigenous Bolivian women are organising themselves engendering political visibility to further their interests. Amy Lind notes how increasingly women with roots in community activism are participating in the official political arena nationally.<sup>50</sup> Through community organisation politically engaged indigenous women have architected spheres to communicate and address shared concerns, nurturing a political identity. As will be discussed, this often stems from politicising women's 'legitimate' domestic identity such as the *supermadre* (supreme mother) figurehead. Their political engagement and visibility is burgeoning, especially since the election of the MAS. Central to their ideological campaign are values of ideological complementarity and culturally sensitive progress, I reiterate that the indigenous movement calls for 'development' but summons a pluriethnic conception of the term.

Acknowledging the aforementioned limitations, this research is neither as widespread nor diverse as I would wish it to be. Nonetheless, it is sufficient to articulate and support my theoretical arguments. I have intentionally narrowed my case studies to three; one local, one national and an internationally acclaimed protest movement. I analyse how these activities question neoliberal ideological hegemony. I begin by exploring the work of Tordoya at her *Ecológica* radio station, followed by evaluating the activism and political orientation of the national Bartolina Sisa confederation. I close this chapter with a detailed conceptual analysis of the 'Water Wars' of Cochabamba. These case studies will articulate my research, by demonstrating some of the innovative ways that Bolivian Indigenous women are organising themselves, constructing a political profile, and contesting the autonomy of orthodox neoliberalism. Consequently, this cultivates a culturally sensitive hybrid development narrative, and critically re-considers liberal feminist dialogues.

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<sup>49</sup> E.Jelin, 'Citizenship and Identity: Final Reflections' Chapter 7 in E. Jelin (Ed.) *Woman and Social Change in Latin America*, (1990), p.204.

<sup>50</sup> Lind, 'Making Feminist Sense of Neoliberalism,' p. 233.

#### 4.1 NURTURING AN INDIGENOUS INTERPRETATION OF RIGHTS: TODOYA'S *ECOLÓGICA* RADIO STATION.

The proliferation of 'gender focused' NGOs throughout the 1990s sought to ameliorate the social consciousness of neoliberal economic intervention. Liberal feminism permeated into rural Bolivian communities through organisations extolling buzz words of female 'empowerment' and agency. In consideration, I present the argument that liberal development discourses counseling individualistic civil rights began complementing indigenous values. As spoken by Margarita Antonio, a Miskita: "Feminism has given us a sense of having rights... and a way of overcoming our subordinated condition of being dominated as women. But we don't have to do this in the ways marked out by feminism."<sup>51</sup> This implies that indigenous women's groups recognise that liberal feminism has provided valuable tools to question unequal relations within their communities, but simultaneously acknowledging that these 'tools' are fixed within a prescribed liberal framework inadequately reflecting culturally specific contexts. The marginalised voice of indigenous 'feminisms' shape a complementary epistemological narrative. They adopt and adapt selective sentiments of individual rights incorporating them within the collective temperament of indigenous peoples to question naturalized *machismo* elements of the region's social imaginary. Indigenous women forge original methods of bridging the gap between the conscripted binaries of individuality and collectively, recognising the value of both.

In the rural town of Cliza, Tordoya, a Quechuan-speaking mother established the *Ecología* radio station. Her local activism illustrates the above sentiments. It also exemplifies the alienation indigenous women experience from liberal feminist discourses. Tordoya established the regional radio program because she was concerned about the participation of women in decision making in her village<sup>52</sup>. She uses the airwaves as a means to reach indigenous women in remote towns and villages with limited access to technology or community-led workshops. This case study demonstrates how indigenous women are shaping a unique 'feminist' consciousness. Her colleague Norah Claros, a participant in the radio workshops, discusses how they struggled to define liberal feminist terminology:

We had heard these words in Spanish, but we didn't know exactly what they meant.

<sup>51</sup> Á. Bastian Duarte, p.162

<sup>52</sup>J. Torrico, 'Using the Airwaves to Empower Quechua Women in Bolivia', *Inter Press Service*, Available at: <http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/11/using-the-airwaves-for-empowerment-of-quechua-women-in-bolivia/>



So we discussed and debated, and defined them in Quechua.<sup>53</sup>

They decided to call ‘gender’ “qhari-warmi” (man-woman), “because a key principle in the Quechua culture is the complementarity and parity of opposites: Men and women have the same rights, capacities and way of life, choosing and being chosen, helping each other in work and in life.”<sup>54</sup> I would like to emphasise that these comprehension of gender equity are reflected in the declarations written at the First Summit of The Indigenous Women of the Americas. They affirm that:

A gender perspective refers to the relations of power between men and women, the perspective that permits a balanced equality between women and men, one that ensures an inclusive look from plurality and diversity, through the exercise of individual rights and the collective rights of the people.<sup>55</sup>

Notions of complementarity and duality eclipse those of the individual, structuring an alternative conception of gender relations, transcending liberal feminism and neoliberal teleology. These sentiments of interdependence are likewise reflected in Aymara marriage. ‘Marriage’ is the symbolic uniting of two souls. The Aymara verb *jaqichana* means to get ‘married’, which interprets as: “to become one person.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, one acquires the status of an adult person only when society joins two together, completing the unit of the social person (*jaqi*.<sup>57</sup>) Needless to say, such sentiments are perhaps presently no more than indigenous nostalgia; nonetheless, it highlights the Indigenous respect of duality and complementarity of genders. In other words, the balance of customary indigenous values with liberal conceptions of rights suggests a hybrid; intercultural ‘feminist’ dialogue is being nurtured, transcending liberal feminist conception of gender relations.

Tordoya’s work narrates an ideological coalescence. This is valuable for my research as it suggests that the mobilised indigenous women’s perspective highlights how academic feminism is removed from the reality of many indigenous women. Evolving indigenous ‘feminisms’ therefore seeks to adapt and expand liberal feminist ideology selectively

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Declaración y Plan de Acción Primera Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas de las Américas: (2002) Available at: [http://www.iidh.ed.cr/comunidades/diversidades/docs/div\\_enlinea/declaracion%20y%20plan%20de%20accion%20cumbre%20mujeres%20indigenas.htm](http://www.iidh.ed.cr/comunidades/diversidades/docs/div_enlinea/declaracion%20y%20plan%20de%20accion%20cumbre%20mujeres%20indigenas.htm)

<sup>56</sup> S. Cusicanqui, ‘Indigenous women and Community Resistance: History and Memory, Andean Oral History Workshop’ Chapter 6 in E. Jelin (Ed.) *Women and Social Change in Latin America*, (Zed Books, 1990) p.161

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

appropriating aspects of feminist discourse whilst balancing this with Mayan culture. This nurtures a complementary discourse, evolving a culturally kaleidoscopic feminism which accounts for the abstract complexities of women's experiences. Through the flexibility of language, debate and communication, one is able to expand static and constructed definitions. This exemplifies Alma Lopez's conception of the complementarity of cultures accredited earlier in my literature review. Indigenous 'feminisms' harmonise elements of both cultures to advance women's interests, envisioning a feminist consciousness beyond the conscripted neoliberal paradigm.

#### 4.2 THE BARTOLINA SISA CONFEDERATION

I follow with analysing the work of the Bartolina Sisa National Confederation of Bolivian Peasant Women. I will discuss how they develop a solidary network between local indigenous women's organisations to consolidate an indigenous women's politicized identity. The objective of the umbrella organisation is to create a dialogue between and support local indigenous women's groups to collectively raise their voice. As a key player in the wider indigenous movement, it self-consciously rejects neoliberalism, notably the presumption that "gender technocracy" should dominate the discourse advancing women's interests.<sup>58</sup> As mentioned earlier, 'Gender Technocracy' is the phenomena of elite professional women associated with NGOs addressing gender-related issues from what they consider an authentic liberal feminist standpoint. Bolivia's gender technocracy developed "in the mid-1980s, when international cooperation funds for development projects with a 'gender approach' became available" exporting hegemonic liberal feminism institutionalised by the UN.<sup>59</sup> This echoes Alvarez's article in my literature review which exposed the espousing of liberal northern-hemispheric feminism through the escalation of NGOs and INGOs. Rousseau reiterates this sentiment within her interview research:

some indigenous female constituents criticised feminist NGOs openly. They accused them of receiving wealth of money flowing from foreign sources, of defending an ideology that pitted women against men rather than recognising each gender's contribution to society, and they reported feeling used by feminist NGOs as clientele.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Monasterios, Available at: <https://nacla.org/news/bolivian-women%E2%80%99s-organisations-mas-era>

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Rousseau, p. 14.

Indigenous women's organisations such as Bartolina Sisa therefore critique this neoliberal paradigm for insufficiently engaging with the layers of indigenous women's discrimination or accommodating indigenous teleology. The confederation is therefore entirely directed and managed by Bolivian indigenous and peasant women.

The Bartolina Sisa Confederation was established in 1980 as the female counterpart to the male-dominated Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB.)<sup>61</sup> The prevalence of segregated family roles and colonial *machismo* culture marginalises many indigenous women from communities' public spheres. Often, local political arenas remain off-limits to indigenous women who experience resistance from male family members when they seek careers in political spheres. At the conception of the woman's organisation, the Bartolinas initially struggled to fully establish their identity and its independent autonomy from the CSUTCB who perceived the Bartolinas as merely a complementary and affiliated branch of their own. Furthermore, internal fractures between the women from different cultural communities became evident.

As my literature review notes, Bolivia has a diverse plethora of indigenous communities with differing languages and values. This has been problematic in configuring the identity of the Bartolina Sisa Confederation. Nonetheless it is precisely this challenge which has shaped the imaginary of the organisation. It has been praised for its refined, diverse and indiscriminate cultural aesthetic. Feminist standpoint acknowledges such complexities. Firstly, one cannot simplify identity nor assume that indigenous women prioritise their indigeneity or sex as their chief social identifier. For instance, an indigenous woman who is part of the LGBT community may primarily identify herself according to her sexuality, or secondly, an indigenous women involved in political activism may identify herself first and foremost as a mother acting for her family rather than an indigenous 'feminist'. The identities and interests of Andean indigenous women are extensive and conflicting. Radcliffe et al. illustrate this by the case of domestic violence that "generates tensions between indigenous women who resist feminist attempts to view everything in terms

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<sup>61</sup> R.León, 'Bartolina Sisa: The Peasant Women's Organisation in Bolivia,' in E.Jelin (Ed.) Women and Social Change in Latin America, p.136.

of gender and groups of younger Indian women who wish to deal with the issue.”<sup>62</sup> It is essential not to assume homogeneity vis-à-vis such issues. This is suggestive of the myriad challenges activist indigenous women face before they even begin to identify as a conscious movement.

These cross-cutting issues within the Bartolinas, has periodically fractured collective unity. Tensions; between the highlands versus lowlands, east versus west and the western highland/valley split between Aymaras and Quechuas are but a few.<sup>63</sup> However, a defining asset of the Barolinia’s is its aptitude to overcome such regional tensions. Its tenacity is its ability to sensitively account for diversity, fostering its holistic nature as a woman’s organisation. The moral temperament of the Bartolina is to accommodate for such difference and value pluriethnicity. This has been reflected in the multiplicity of meanings and symbols that form the federation.<sup>64</sup> As Jelin surmises, where the Bartolinas are fiercely united, is in their ability to question accepted forms of social organisation, by looking back to the collective memory of traditional cultural resistance to unite a politically engaged female demographic and movement for change.<sup>65</sup>

Fundamental to the Bartolinas is their commitment to “ending the double (or triple) discrimination of being indigenous, peasant, and women.”<sup>66</sup> While some critics have considered their ‘gender focus’ weak, they campaign for increasing indigenous women’s access to education, women’s land rights, and lobby government to raise awareness of women’s lack of representation in political spheres. While much of the work of the Bartolinas’ coordinates with and supports the wider indigenous movement, the Bartolinas’ draw up their own proposals upon issues which garner scant attention in the public domain but which have a resounding impact upon women or vulnerable sects of society. Their main point of departure from the indigenous movement a priori is raising the voice of indigenous *women* within the neostructuralist movement and securing gender-specific issues upon the political agenda.

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> G. Potter and L. Zurita, ‘The Peasant Women’s Movement in Bolivia: ‘Bartolina Sisa’ and ‘COCAMTROP’ in C. Deere and F. Royce, Rural Social Movements in Latin America: Organising for Sustainable Livelihoods, (Florida Scholarship Online, 2009) p.231.

<sup>64</sup> E.Jelin, p. 202-3. And, ‘Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia “Bartolina Sisa” Website. Available at: <http://www.apcbolivia.org/org/cnmciob-bs.aspx>

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p.203.

<sup>66</sup> Potter and Zurita, p. 231.

A notable campaign they are leading refutes the introduction of Western agricultural practices. I draw attention to this specific campaign for it relevantly demonstrates the confederation's ideologically anti-neoliberal, and pluriethnic sentiments. Traditional indigenous cultures espouse women as affiliated with the land, instilling women's agency communally. Thus the Bartolinas promote an "ecologically sustainable peasant economy... [organising] local peasant women's groups to work in their own communities with ecologically appropriate agricultural techniques."<sup>67</sup> They lead the national campaign against genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Potter explains that this campaign is an international movement organised by the international peasant federation 'La Vía Campesina.' In Bolivia however, it is directed by the Bartolina Sisa's against the use of genetically modified soya production. Women, who have traditionally been 'protectors' of the seed supply for thousands of years, are adamant that they should not become yet another commodity.<sup>68</sup> Moreover they are concerned that GM crops would make the country more reliant upon the market and the country dependent upon international imports.<sup>69</sup> This conflict illustrates indigenous skepticism towards neoliberal market-driven initiatives which tamper with the land in exploitative, unnatural means. The Bartolina Sisa's stress ecological development, and direct the national campaign for holistic agricultural practices. Ecological family-based agriculture and food sovereignty are key proponents of the organised indigenous and rural women's movement of Bolivia. This case study indicates how indigenous women are undermining resource exploitative neoliberal free-market driven conception of development, whilst simultaneously presenting conceptual alteriority to liberal feminism.

#### 4.3 THE LEGACY OF THE *SUPERMADRE*: THE 'WATER WARS' OF COCHABAMBA

I now look to the 'Water Wars' of 2000, to exemplify one of the ways in which indigenous women are actively protesting against neoliberalism. The Cochabamba 'Water War' has become an iconic case within indigenous literature as a formidable civilian protest. Women, notably indigenous women, were at the forefront of the movement, which distinguishes it as a particularly useful case-study for this dissertation. One could argue it sowed the seeds for

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.237.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.238.

national mobilisation; paving the way for the Gas Wars of 2003, a second water war in La Paz, 2007, and prequels the ascension of the Morales' government. It internationally resonated as the first civilian protest that overthrew an internationally privatised water company: Aguas del Tunari, an Anglo-American and Bolivian-backed consortium.<sup>70</sup> The conflict was provoked by the privatisation of drinking water in Cochabamba, which was imposed by the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the IMF.<sup>71</sup> Local civilian protest escalated, people took to the streets and revolted, forcing the government to default and repeal Law 2029 (written by International Finance Institutions (IFIs)). Aguas del Tunari sought profit from the water in the Cochabamba region resulting in deplorable hikes in cost between 30 to 300 per cent.<sup>72</sup> Prior to implementation, the gendered implications of this privatisation were not satisfactorily considered, meaning women were among the first to feel the impact.

This case study is particularly significant for this research for three central reasons. Firstly, it exemplifies *how* Bolivian indigenous communities are mobilising to reject neoliberal intervention from 'above.' Secondly, it captures the nature of indigenous *women's* activism (this is noteworthy for they were principal players in motivating, organising and leading the protest). Finally, it articulates the ways in which indigenous women are asserting themselves politically while preserving their cultural identity. This is evident within the politicised female figure of the *supermadre* (supreme mother). One could argue that the Cochabamba Water Wars have been fundamental to raising the voice of indigenous women across Bolivia. The indigenous political profile was raised by the legacy of the conflict which the subsequent election of MAS indicates.

However, while viewing the feat as poignant and symbolic success, it is also critical, as standpoint methodology dictates, not to sensationalise its legacy on the Bolivian indigenous women's movement. The case study is equally useful for examining the myopias of women's activism in Bolivia. Despite being publically celebrated, women, specifically indigenous women, consistently struggle to be acknowledged and represent in the political realm; the reverent rhetoric overstates the reality. Women remained excluded and under-

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<sup>70</sup> N.Laurie, 'Gender Water Networks: Femininity and Masculinity in Water Politics in Bolivia' International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Vol. 35, (2011) p.178-9.

<sup>71</sup> P.Beltrán, 'Water, Privatisation and Conflict: Women from the Cochabamba Valley,' Global Issue Papers, No. 4 (2004) p.4.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

represented in the political spheres despite political public rhetoric which appears gender progressive. The bureaucracy behind the Water Wars makes this apparent.

The privatisation of water was gender and culturally blind. Women suffered directly at the extreme hike in costs of water, struggling to provide enough water to sustain their families, and maintain basic sanitation. The privatisation failed to recognise that typically, women assume the role of water-provider and family irrigator. This is apparent within cultural indigenous custom in which water is perceived with a degree of sacristy. Prior to privatisation, neighborhood and communal water systems were established in rural communities, directed by the solidarity of women's groups and locally run cooperatives. Water was thus a communal venture, and a central cornerstone of society. These harmonious and sustainable water systems "that had been built with work and contributions mostly from women of the communities suddenly became property of the private companies."<sup>73</sup> This quote is important for it draws attention to the opposing visions about water: the business comprehension on the one hand; orientated towards profitability and privatisation, and the conflicting Indigenous Cosmo-visions and communal practices of local societies emphasising common, solidarity-based use of water on the other. Many of the community irrigation cooperatives were established upon "socio-cultural fabrics of a longstanding socio-cultural and socioeconomic tradition".<sup>74</sup> Problematically, the IFIs disacknowledged the above, thus propelling the fiercely anti-neoliberal nature of the protest.

Women were among the first to mobilise, were key to its strategic organisation, and were essential to ensure it remained non-violent. The role of the women should not be understated for this was not a casual connection. Articulating Beltrán's comprehension, the privatisation of water was a step too far. It directly insulted cultural and historical practice. The holistic relationship between women and water were amidst the leading values that forced the women to stand first to defend their rights:

When we arrived to our water supply in Tiquipaya, we found that soldiers were there and we were unable to access our water source – a water source that had always been ours, *always*, from the time before our grandparents...They were taking away our right to water and to life. This could not be allowed to happen.<sup>75</sup> (Vicky, Tiquipaya:

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<sup>73</sup> Beltrán, p.4.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* p.8.

<sup>75</sup> V.Tiquipia, In, Beltrán, p.20.

Irrigator)

Among indigenous and peasant culture, the personal relationship between women and water is deeper than the neoliberal imaginary. For many indigenous women, water is perceived with a degree of sacristy for it echoes sentiments of *Pachamama* (mother earth: as protector, provider, nurturer and life giver.

For a child to be born, first our own body's water breaks... Bathe the children, wash the dishes, wash the fruit and vegetables, bathe oneself, prepare fruit drinks, drink water, prepare the food, call the rains, pay and thank the land so that there is water and production.<sup>76</sup>

These, Beltrán notes, are some of the traditional nostalgic sentiments, practices and meanings that some indigenous and rural women associate with water.

The cooperative irrigation communities, dominated and organised by women, further reflects these Cosmo-visions of water, fortifying the traditional concept of women as guardians of wellbeing at the heart of communities. The irrigation collectives were managed and organised predominantly by women indoctrinating *Ayni* values, and *Mita* theology. The *Mita* system is:

a pre-colonial, Andean manner of realizing community work in agriculture or other tasks. Here people take turns, have rights and obligations: improvements, rehabilitation, maintenance, etc. These are systems of reciprocity of the communities themselves. Reciprocity is *ayni* – a system, in which one family cooperates with another by turn, and then the next family does the same when needed, and although this is not obligatory, it works because of the “pleasure of giving.”<sup>77</sup>

This quotation explores traditional indigenous epistemology. Such sentiments are most prevalent in rural communities in which water is often less accessible and thus a communal venture. Moreover, one cannot assume that all indigenous and peasant women preached such nostalgia, (especially in the more urbanised areas of Cochabamba.) Nonetheless these Cosmic-values are widespread, aligned to the notion of the women-as-mother-earth and cultural reproducer.

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p.21.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27-28.



These quotations give an indication of the direct affront the privatisation of water (imbued with neoliberalism) would have upon the livelihoods of indigenous and peasant women. It undermined their legitimacy within social realms in which they were enterprising and proactive. Ultimately, privatisation and the endorsement of neoliberal teleology damaged indigenous women's social standing. It withdrew their agency to provide water for themselves and their families. Once international neoliberal institutions threatened this sacridity, it resonated as a step too far. In turn, water (and thus the neoliberal sentiments it was tainted with) became a symbolic axis by which indigenous women could collaborate to contest the neoliberal agenda. This opened political spaces in which they could caveat a forum of indigenous women's activism.

This exemplifies my case; that Bolivian indigenous women's organisation compose a deepened, cultural 'feminist' dialect. The conflict demonstrated the unique nature of indigenous women's activism for a myriad of reasons. Firstly, it illustrates the potential of community organisations such as the water and irrigation groups to foster a space for women's political activism. Secondly, under the culturally acceptable figure of *supermadre* women who previously may have refrained from protest and political activism were able to come forwards and show their commitment publically.

They thus project a traditional, domestic and therefore politically 'safe' femininity, while at the same time opening up the space for seemingly non-traditional forms of behaviour and activities.<sup>78</sup>

Through the process of protesting about their 'legitimate' concerns, previously disinclined indigenous women gained access to the public and political arenas from the culturally conventional orientation of mothers and wives. They mobilised around the 'construct' of the *supermadre*. Practical "gender needs and a concern with household survival mechanisms... have helped construct a powerful political identity for women."<sup>79</sup>

Castillo likewise recalls this notion; that local groups organizing to meet over immediate legitimate problems foster a space for female indigenous activism. She notes how peasant movements gathering to address agricultural hardship at the cost of environmentally exploitative, neoliberal initiatives, become a space for indigenous women and leftist activism,

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<sup>78</sup> Laurie, p.179.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

opening a platform from which they can interact and discuss wider issues pertinent to them.

Whilst:

formal deliberations have centered on agrarian problems, women have begun to share ideas and experiences informally. Gender inequalities within families, communities, and organisation have become conversation topics during meetings.... [Indigenous women are actively developing their] own feminist agenda, expanding the criticism against capitalist inequality and reflecting on gender and racial exclusion.<sup>80</sup>

This exemplifies some of the evolutionary spheres by which a sense of indigenous female-orientated consciousness is evolving. As I have mentioned, this extends the conception of ‘feminism’. It illustrates how rather than self-defined ‘feminist’ movements, gender awareness can be culturally complementary. It articulates a refreshing hybridity. By adapting and incorporating ‘family’ values, women are able to extend their political activism sculpting a movement against neoliberalism. Consequently, this engenders an indigenous female consciousness which challenges discrimination within their communities. In sum, I argue international liberal feminist ideology should recognize the value of this evolving discourse.

Nonetheless, it is important to note the limitations of the *supermadre* figure. As stressed by Chaney, the heroic *supermadre* appears to indoctrinate a finite role for women’s activism. It posits that women who have experience of activism within the political arena are expected to remain in the political spheres for a shorter period than men; to return to the domestic spheres. In Latin America, women’s entry into the political realm occurs at the ‘crisis points’ in their nations’ histories.<sup>81</sup> Women’s propensity to withdraw seems a universal phenomenon. Women who take a powerful active role in public affairs at time of crisis often have no opportunity to consolidate or advance their gains. Chaney terms this pattern of involvement one of “entry/retirement.”<sup>82</sup> Although celebrated as invaluable at the time of crisis, the image of the woman’s domestic role is not sufficiently changed to allow for more than a few to remain in the political spheres after the crisis has calmed. One could argue such was the case in the wake of the Water War. Whilst true in many respects, I would equally like to stress, that the legacy of the conflict and the subsequent escalation both the women’s and wider indigenous movement as a whole, challenges the validity of this viewpoint. Nonetheless I believe it is relevant and one must not overstate the metaphor.

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<sup>80</sup> Hernández Castillo, p. 542-543.

<sup>81</sup> E. Chaney, *Supermadre: Women in Politics in Latin America*, (University of Texas Press, 1979) p.23

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

One interesting phenomenon of the Water War was that it publically sensationalised and garnered a new-found respect for indigeneity. 'Indigeneity' became desirable. *Mestizo* (typically mix-raced urban upwardly mobile people from indigenous origin) who had sought previously to distance themselves from their indigenous origins began reclaiming this part of their heritage. Women played an important part in "making cross-class alliances that not only allowed rural people to occupy the urban area as 'Bolivians,' but also allowed *mestizo* Bolivians to claim indigenous heritage."<sup>83</sup> Bustamante *et al.* recognise the key role women played in strengthening solidarity between urban and rural women which helped lessen initial tensions. The dignified symbolism of indigeneity became reclaimed.

One could argue that this act of indigenous women's leadership consolidated wider anti-neoliberal sentiments beyond rural indigenous communities into the urban spheres of Bolivia. It helped to erode urban-rural divisive dichotomies and remedied a legacy of hostility. Rather than bitterly defending their differences, they sought to embrace the marriage of cultures. It depleted entrenched racial tensions between cultures and furthered the concerns of indigenous populations regionally. One could argue they guided the urbanised community to make a stand against neoliberal agendas furthering anti-neoliberal sentiments nationally.

Although the water war of Cochabamba was publically championed as a 'heroic' success of the local overthrowing the global, one must avoid overstating the narrative. Myriad oppressions continue to marginalize indigenous Bolivian women. Whilst the allegory of the *supermadre* opened previously inaccessible and culturally 'legitimate' avenues by which to further publicise women's issues, the Water War case study is equally as useful to explore the challenges indigenous women still experience. The visibility of women, especially in leadership positions remained problematic. Though women were instrumental in the success of the protest both within the logistical spheres and on the front line, they remained sidelined from the political spheres of authority. There was only one woman in the *Coordinadora de Defensa de Agua y de la Vida* (Coordination for the Defense of Water and Life) and she was in charge of communication, strategically organizing the blockades.<sup>84</sup> Although an essential role, she was not one of the four members selected in the general

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<sup>83</sup> Laurie, p.180.

<sup>84</sup> Laurie, p.182.

assembly to be an official spokesperson who represented the *Coordinadora* in meetings with the government. She was outspoken in her concerns that this would eliminate a female voice in the negotiation processes.<sup>85</sup> One could cynically argue that while the male-dominated *Coordinadora* recognised the cardinal value of women's participation, they did little more than draw on it as part of strategic campaigning.

Rousseau likewise articulates such concerns in her analysis of the indigenous women's profile in the 2009 constitutional assembly. Morales' campaign championed gender equity. With MAS's arrival to power, a significant number of indigenous women and nonindigenous working-class women assumed a place within the Bolivian parliament and constituent assembly, at unprecedented levels of participation. Nonetheless, she recognises that this is a fragile position, with lauded promises for gender parity often not being met:

Even though Evo Morales has wanted to project an image of himself as a women-friendly leader and supporter of indigenous autonomy... Instead of an assembly in which women would hold 50 percent of seats and indigenous peoples would have direct representation, as several civil society actors had proposed, the MAS government decided that constituents would be elected through party lists with gender alternation (*alternancia*) in the lists. Because in fact women were rarely positioned on top of the lists, this led to women occupying 88 seats of 255 (33 percent)<sup>86</sup>.

The above quotations epitomise the problematic, exploring the deeper localised complexities associated with raising awareness of indigenous women's concerns publically. One cannot contest that the profile of indigenous women has been raised monumentally. However, it is important to engage with the deeper limitations, acknowledging the disparity between public 'pro-woman' political discourse and the reality, which is somewhat erred.

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Rousseau, p.12.

## 5. Conclusion

This dissertation has critically analysed the myopias of the hegemonic neoliberal development paradigm, and drawn attention to the uncomfortable truth that liberal feminism unwittingly indoctrinates capitalist neoliberal teleology. Drawing on the academic literature of Eisenstein and Fraser, I framed the ideological Marxist-feminist parameters of this research. This dissertation has questioned the fundamental structures of globalised relationships to demonstrate how neoliberal constructs dictate contemporary perception of ‘development.’ I have contested the blinkered neoliberal assumption that development must be tied to a Western preconception of the term; that the Global South must mirror the Global North, arguing that alternative, less culturally destructive, and more holistic conceptions of progress are feasible. This has been presented through close analysis of the Indigenous movement for change escalating in Bolivia. I have specifically analysed the temperament and essential role of *women’s* activism within this movement.

My literature review contextualised and justified the avenue of this research. Alvarez and Isserles’ articles demonstrated how neoliberal, individualistic and market-directed development discourse infiltrated into Latin America through SAPs, consolidated by the escalation of NGOs and INGOs during the 1990s. SAPs lauded globalised free-market capitalism, and development; needless to say, they indoctrinated a market-orientated and individualistic notion of the term. Yashar and Radcliffe *et al* considered how neoliberal intervention and the societally destructive consequences it imbued, antagonised and politicised previously apolitical indigenous communities. They were obliged to coordinate themselves to defend their rights. As Hernández Castillo recalls, it was within these community openings that an indigenous women’s consciousness was fabricated. Through local discussions, previously unaddressed gender-specific concerns were raised. The infiltration of culturally blind neoliberal institutions catalysed the self-consciously anti-neoliberal sentiment of the indigenous movement of Bolivia, and opened spaces in which indigenous women could confer over their experiences of being indigenous and female.

In applying feminist standpoint, this dissertation has highlighted how subjugated viewpoints offer a unique perspective to critically evaluate the legitimacy of the current trajectory of globalisation, and expose the obscured neoliberal dynamic of liberal feminism. Rousseau’s research engaged with an important problematic: that liberal feminism can be

alienating to indigenous women in its preoccupation with the individual. Nonetheless, as my 'Cautionary Reflections' demonstrated, one must equally avoid sensationalising narratives from 'below' and recognise the existence of discriminations indigenous women experience within their own cultures.

A particularly interesting insight of this dissertation was the concept of 'resurrecting' nostalgic indigenous Cosmic-values to enrich comprehensions of gender-relationships. This notion was apparent within the Declaration from the First Summit of Indigenous Women of the Americas and in the research of Hernández Castillo. Relationships of *Duality* and *Complementarity* transcend the liberal feminist binaries of gender. This was articulated most clearly within the case-study of Tordoya and Norah who defined words for 'gender' in Quechan. This justifies my argument; that Bolivia's indigenous women, alienated from hegemonic liberal feminism are creating an alternative and hybrid feminist discourse. It develops upon and transcends current liberal feminism, by adopting and selectively incorporating elements of both ideologies to knit together an enriched women's consciousness. Bastian Duarte's exemplifies this when she discusses how indigenous women appropriate the relevant 'tools' presented by liberal feminist frameworks, but tailor them to suit their cultural teleologies, moving beyond the transcribed liberal feminist framework. In the words of Eisenstein, they architect a 'third way.' What I argue, is that liberal feminism should use this standpoint to critically reflect upon its current consciousness, and recognise its uncomfortable relationship with neoliberalism.

The ideological temperament of the Bartolina Sisa Confederation, reflects these sentiments of hybridity. Furthermore, they undermine the homogeneity of neoliberalism in their respect of pluriethnicity and ethnic diversity. They challenge and raise the profile of specific sex and racial discriminations experience of indigenous women, while endorsing alternatives to the development paradigm of neoliberal globalisation. The case-study of their campaigning against GMOs demonstrates this. My analysis of the Water War of Cochabamba strengthens my argument of cultural hybridity and demonstrates the overtly anti-neoliberal sentiment of Bolivia's indigenous women's activism. Women were essential to the success of the protest. They fought against the globalised profit-maximising water companies rallying behind the figurehead of the *supermadre*. The legacy of their work is evident in their raised profile within the political spheres. Rousseau demonstrated their ability to ensure indigenous women's concerns were recognised within the 2009 constitutional reform, at unprecedented levels.

This dissertation had ultimately shown that an active indigenous women's movement is proliferating in Bolivia. It fabricates an enriched, more holistic women's consciousness, which is not 'tarred with the same neoliberal brush' of liberal feminism, so to speak. However one must be cautious not to sensationalise this narrative. As Rosusseau and Laurie notes, perhaps the reverent rhetoric of the Morales government in its respect for indigenous women's concerns is little more than a campaign 'buzz word;' a mirage more than a reality. Time will dictate the trajectory this takes. Nonetheless, I close this dissertation as I began, with a quote from Eisenstein. Regardless, of whether this is the case, one cannot deny that Bolivia's indigenous women's movement is escalating and eye catching, showing to the rest of the world, that "alternatives to the present [patriarchal and globalised] system are possible."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Eisenstein, preface, xi.

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