

Paths of Experiences and Learnings:

F E M I N I S T P O I N T S O N P R A C T I C A L P O L I T I C S

by Florencia Partenio, Universidad de Buenos Aires/CEIL, Argentina

The purpose of this article is to construct some points around the links between personal and political transformation. In this case, my reflections come from praxis as well as the point of view of a feminist activist who works in a University, working from a perspective of participatory action research. Based on this, the article focuses on a process of political mobilization that has attracted the attention of journalists as well as social science researchers in the last decade.

At the end of the 1990s, road blocks and pickets were installed as one of the most popular forms of protest against neo-liberal politics by the poor and very poor sectors of Argentinean society. These organizations of unemployed workers were also known as “picketers” and became a focus of resistance in the face of the growing unemployment, inequality and poverty. As to the composition of these movements, the majority of its participants were women that assumed different responsibilities in the everyday community work of the organization. However, very few women were able to reach the positions of direction or political coordination within these organizations.

In 2004, I met the “women picketers” from the “Popular Front of Darrío Santillán” (FPDS), an autonomous social movement made up mostly of organizations of unemployed workers as well as sala-

ried workers, student groups, and work cooperatives. These women comrades initiated an organization called ‘Women’s Spaces’ within the movement as a space for those women who were beginning to share and visualize their problems as poor unemployed women.

In the work that they initiated within ‘Women’s Spaces’, they surfaced a series of strategies and new challenges within the movement itself. As part of this, they questioned the forms of struggles that are necessary to change society. Since the formation of FPDS, it has maintained that the focus on working towards “social change” must be observable in the present lives of the women involved. They considered that in order to change society, it requires two types of strategies that go hand in hand to change the capitalist system and everyday relationships.

These women put at the center of their mobilization and organizing experience, an old feminist slogan which raises the following questions: ‘How does one take the political process forward in a way that will transform society, thereby transforming one’s life?’ and ‘What are the pathways that will open themselves as part of creating one’s ‘own space’ within a social movement?’

The key answers to these questions are found in the formation and construction of ‘Women’s Spaces’. Since the start of their journey in 2003, the construction

has included sessions on the practicality of engagements, as well as their articulation and formation. From the sessions on practicalities, the women who formed their movement by reclaiming the narratives of their own lives, beginning with everyday life experience. On the other hand, their articulation of their positions within feminist’s organizations and other women’s groups was also considered as central to their Space, in this way extending their limits and boundaries to engage with the experiences of other Argentine and Latin Americans.

The sessions on gender development were conceptualized as workshops and activities where popular education techniques were used to share and construct tools. It is here where one finds one of the main keys to change - precisely to recognize local forms of knowledge and to re-value the cognitive dimensions of their own experiences (Bach, 2010). Through these practices, they established channels to advance political debates towards the recognition and production of active human rights demands.

Accordingly, the politics of sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, and the links between work and care, were taken up as hot issues and demands within their movement. These issues were then articulated within wider discussions such as food security and the struggle for dignified work.

Eight years since its first assembly, Women’s Spaces has become a space for the sharing of experiences and collective production of knowledge for those who have initiated and accompanied its journey. In this journey, women have shown us that revolutions are also initiated in the plazas, in the home, and in the bed. This is not only a struggle experience, but also one of “pleasure”.

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The Relationship Between Economic and Gender Justice

by Masaya Llaveneras, Universidad Central de Venezuela, Venezuela

It is necessary to critically explore the potential of mainstreaming gender perspectives in the planning system and public budget as a tool for the elimination of the injustices in terms of distribution and implementation of gender sensitive budgets in Venezuela. In order to change stereotypes and the redistribution of resources, recognition is pivotal.

Gender is part of the structure of the economy, generating forms of exploitation. This calls for measures affecting the distribution of resources, goods, and services as well as redistributive measures. It is also important to keep in mind that this form of exploitation contributes to, and interacts with other forms of subordinations based on class, race and/or ethnicity.

The devaluation of women in the economy maintains their subordination in the socio-cultural sphere, thus, reproducing gender injustice continuously. For investments aimed at achieving equality between men and women to be effective, it is, therefore, required to recognize these two aspects of gender injustice.

Feminists have begun to focus on public resources only recently. In Venezuela, the gender sensitive budget was a presidential decree, but women's organizations were not aware enough of budgets to implement it. Since 2005, we have worked hard on its implementation.

It is necessary to promote an understanding of the national budget planning exercise as technical and political processes cutting across all sectors of the State and as spaces needed to ensure the exercise of rights.

Latin American experiences of gender responsive budgets have made significant contributions to methodology: considering the particularities of the region, its countries and localities, as important elements for the success of initiatives. The methodological tools applied within the Andean region paid special attention to the legal context and the institutional framework of which budgets are developed; the degree to which the budget relies on unpaid work; and the mechanisms of participation in the budget process.



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The importance of categories and mobilization

The work of Bolivian women in using new categories of analysis was very important as an example of budget for Venezuela. These were categories of expenditure, based on women's analysis of budgets from a different point of view of which they relied on their experience, the reality of Bolivia and the feminist agenda. These new categories used by Bolivian women focused on the audit of both executed expenditure and budgeted costs. These categories were applied to the analysis of the allocation of resources and sources of financing for specific policies relating to: 1) Investment focused on women to close gender gaps. 2) Investment in social and government co-responsibility for family care and the reproduction of the workforce. 3) Investment for de-colonization and the construction of cultural equality. 4) Investment in social redistribution and other conditions for gender equality. It is important to note that links between research and advocacy is essential.

With respect to the adoption of participatory budgeting, mobilization is very important. In Caroni, one of the first municipalities to implement participatory

budgeting, the process started in 2006. It is an interesting location for such pilot implementation because the town has a historic presence of women's movements and popular organization.

The expenditure analysis showed that only 0.05% of total budgeted expenditure of the municipality was directed to gender equality over the observed period. Despite the few resources allocated to them, a high level of attendance of women was recorded in relation to the programs and processes for women, such as sexual and reproductive health, and employment generation based on the policy of gender equity). This demonstrated the need to analytically distinguish between attendance and participation.

It was discovered that women tended to attend in large numbers, but did not participate in the same proportion in final decisions on budget allocation. When consulted about it, women community leaders and beneficiaries of public policies cited the lack of time to participate in the workshops.

In 2007, the convening hours were changed and children's activities were incorporated to allow women to participate until the decision-making sessions in the participatory budgeting workshops.

In 2011, there was a greater parity in the participation of men and women in the workshops. The allocation of resources to the maternity hospital of the municipality was incorporated among the priorities of the participatory budget.

Despite this greater involvement in decision-making, it was observed that women participants prioritized the needs of their spouses and family, in general, leaving aside their strategic needs at the community level. This came out clearly during the participatory budgeting in 2006, when the municipal government included domestic violence as a priority for public consultation. This issue had been raised in consultation workshops with women from communities in the municipality. However, this issue was removed from the participatory assemblies by the citizens, themselves, and replaced by urban improvements issues.

After this experience, it was only in the 2009 participatory assemblies that

women began to actively participate in decision-making. This allowed for direct municipal budget discussions on the problems of women and the incorporation of public policies related to issues on gender violence and teen pregnancy as well as the promotion of women's rights. This opened the articulation of political claims by women. These claims have allowed the challenging of contradiction between public and private and have incorporated women's demands as political participants.

In Venezuela, although some progress has been made, there are two risks: 1) a high dependence on political will, and 2) the risk of perpetuating inequality through policies framed in the existing gender order.

It is important to take the challenge of creating categories of analysis based on the reality of the contexts in which they are applied to. Above all, the aim must not only be to diagnose or portray a

budget situation, but also to transform it by influencing the logic of the distribution of public resources.

Although gender-responsive budgeting is a real strategy for the mainstreaming of gender and class justice in the work of the State, we should not lose sight of the socio-political and cultural content of the policies to which resources are allocated because it is important in ensuring its just redistribution.

While Venezuela has managed to incorporate some of the concerns of informal workers, most of which are women, in the national budget, there is still much to do. There are still very few women engaging in budget discussions and sessions. We have to maintain lobbying and produce the numbers.

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A Bolivian Reflection on The Rights of Mother Earth:

Can One Law Really Bring about Global Attitude Shifts?

by Verónica J. Salinas P., Campaña Boliviana por el Derecho a la Educación, Bolivia

Since 2007, peasant indigenous organizations of Bolivia have discussed the need for a document that sets out the responsibilities and obligations for citizens as well as states in terms of how to respect Mother Earth. In the Bolivian political scene, they have been the proponents of this legislative initiative.

The truth is that Bolivia has taken on great responsibility in approving this law. It is more than just a judicial and legislative project. It is a political project with the ambition of proposing an attitudinal change at the global level. It is based on a view that such an attitudinal shift is a required foundation for reversing reverse climate change (notably the direct consequences of indiscriminate commerce and unrestricted consumerism and marketisation) that has led to humans not recognizing the autonomy and spirit of Mother Earth.

This attitudinal shift is a concrete demand to change human consciousness. It is far from the often-stated objective of just 'raising awareness'. What we need is to generate a cultural revolution whereby the work is centered on the transmission

of a collective consciousness—based on the urgency of change to some of the basic cultural values in our societies. How? The proposed law responds by establishing a new paradigm of "good living" as an alternative to a system of capitalist living standards.

This change in human consciousness goes hand in hand with a knowledge that science now explains, and that indigenous peoples have already known – that the Earth is as a semiotic unit, communicative, feeling, who makes her own decisions. This is a cosmo-vision constituted in a narrative truth, which is based on hope for change.

However, there is a risk in constructing arbitrarily an ethnocentric consciousness that reproduces a logic according to which, "if you are part of my ethnic group and share my beliefs, you are saved; if not, you are condemned". This merely recreates another fundamentalism. The task is not to construct another hegemonic narrative (such as the scientific narrative) but to awaken a human communion with Mother Earth.

Such a reality necessarily rejects a

system of domination and generates discomfort for privileged individuals. In this respect, it is important to recognize that our own historical memory is also permeated by patriarchal domination expressed in ideological systems that are social constructs or organizational forms defining the relations between people considered superior or inferior. This has constrained gender equality and generated exponential growth in all forms of gender violence. In the same way as it was questioned whether the Indians of the Americas had a soul or not, women are not recognized in public spheres - and much less, as having rights - and Mother Earth is not recognized as a communicative being with rights. It is in the same way that we have legitimized the possibilities of abuse, slavery and killing of those who are deemed not to possess soul, rights, or autonomy. In light of this, we can "question" the discourse of colonization and patriarchalization – can they be put on the same boat?

The process of human consciousness is not a novelty. In reality - and it is where



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I want to make reference to the surge of social movements, and among them, the suffrage and feminist movements, the environmental movement and the movement of indigenous peoples that originated in the 70s – they have all criticized Eurocentric and androcentric modernization. The feminist movement, in the words of Rosa Cobo, “was a small movement of the masses with the capacity to influence, mobilize politically, and create an extraordinary strong conscience,” so strong, that today, it permits us to speak of de-patriarchalization.

Therefore, I could say that the law of the rights of Mother Earth is a hybrid discourse that includes both judicial discourse and an indigenous cosmivision towards an explicit recognition of collective subjects, as elaborated in the study of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “The Knowing from the South”.

In this case, Mother Earth takes the character of a collective subject of public interest. Here she is recognized by the law as a bearer of the right to life, biodiversity, water, clean air, equilibrium, restoration, and freedom from pollution. In this law, no other rights can limit the existence of the rights of Mother Earth.

Along with the recognition of Mother Earth, the individual is always recognized as the bearer of rights. So would there be a collision between the rights of Mother Earth and human rights? The apparent collision is diluted by articulating rights of Mother Earth that are similar to the individual expression of rights to health, dignity, and the right to live in a healthy environment. The way this is expressed in the Bolivian law is that ‘all Bolivians take part in the community of beings that comprise Mother Earth, exercising the rights es-

tablished by the Law, in a manner that is compatible with their own individual and collective rights’.

But in order to go further - viewing Mother Earth as possessing eligible rights and the individual as a facilitator for exercise of such rights - we are pre-supposing the existence of a communicative space between nature and humans that actively works to interpret, translate, and value issues as being either favorable, or as threats to life. In practical terms, this is about the development of state politics and construction of tools for social vigilance. In Bolivia, it is about redirecting the production system of the country (that up to now has sustained itself through the extravagant use of resources, hydro-carbon, mining and deforestation) towards an alternative development model that is also not necessarily contradictory with the local application of international normative frameworks.

For Bolivia and the other signatory countries of the United Nations, the Covenant 169 of the ILO provides a concrete instrument to implement a list of established agreed principles, the most prominent of which is “prior, free and informed consent” of indigenous peoples, concerning use of natural resources. However, despite the national discourse that talks about a harmony between development, and the protection of Mother Earth, the Bolivian law on ‘Buen Vivir’ does not mention the principle of prior, free and informed consent. This omission is a political decision that pretends to establish the conceptual landscape of Mother Earth as demonstrated above, while really concealing a contradictory reality of neo-liberal development.

Is this Bolivian law sufficient or a uto-



Ana Augustino and Nicole Bidegain Ponte of the ICAE secretariat with Marianela Carvajal Diaz, DTI 2007 alumna, from the Dominican Republic

pian dream? We can agree the law is a useful initial response, but cannot affirm that the attitudinal shift that this law tries to generate is embedded in the collective consciousness enough so that it can be constructed in reality. Right now, there is limited capacity to regenerate this idea, and most importantly, there are limits in the political will of governments to change their actions.

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