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"We are Indians, Whores and Lesbians, Revolted and Twined Together". Decolonial Feminism in Bolivia

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the text is to analyse contemporary Bolivian decolonial feminism using Cusicanqui's model of cultural hybridity. Cusicanqui formulated the concept of *ch'ixi* as an analytical tool for theorizing about the mixing of cultures that maintain distinct aspects but enter a mutual creative dialogue and create new qualities through it. In my analysis, I focus on two streams of Bolivian decolonial feminism, represented by *Mujeres Creando* and *Mujeres Creando Comunidad* movements. First, I describe historical roots of Bolivian decolonial feminism with an emphasis on the influence of anarchist ideas both on the formation of the Bolivian workers' movement and on strategies and practices of social and indigenous movements at the turn of the millennium. In the following discussion I analyse the ideologies and strategies of *Mujeres Creando* and *Mujeres Creando Comunidad* movements using Cusicanqui's model of hybridity. I conclude that both movements construct a subversive network of alternative knowledge and practices, within which seemingly contradictory experiences can coexist harmoniously and create a new, non-dichotomous qualities. According to Cusicanqui, these *ch'ixi* spaces are the source of a new, emerging epistemology based on which a radical vision of decolonised modernity can be formulated.

KEY WORDS: Aymara, Anarcho-feminism, *ch'ixi*, Community, Decolonial feminism, feminism, Indian hegemony

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"We community feminists continue with our left fist raised, because the system has not been defeated, because the system continues to hurt our bodies and the bodies of our brothers and nature. This system of oppression has been permanently recycled ever since it was built, it is not a natural system, it was made historically, and it will also end historically because of the revolutionary action of the people" (Paredes 2013).

Introduction: Practicing the radical theory of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui

Many anthropological texts have been written about the indigenous peoples of Bolivia, the country with the largest indigenous populations in South America (Fabricant and Postero 2015; Postero 2017; Sturtevant 2021). Bolivian social and indigenous movements have been widely analysed over the last two decades (Van Cott 2008; Yashar 2005). Identity politics, the process of negotiating territorial autonomies and the dynamics of the relationship between the plurinational state and local communities are frequently researched topics (Canessa 2006; Canessa 2014; Tockman and Cameron 2018). Surprisingly, relatively few studies have analysed the impact of anarchist ideas on the formation and strategies of social and indigenous movements (Cusicanqui 2020; Laforcade 2020; Laforcade and Hirsch 2020). Likewise, most studies have used a theoretical apparatus based on the Western academia tradition (Shilliam 2013) and have overlooked local theoretical currents that are primarily perceived as a subject of analysis, but not as a possible theoretical and analytical framework.

The aim of the following text is to analyse two currents of contemporary Bolivian decolonial feminism represented by the *Mujeres Creando* and *Mujeres Creando Comunidad* movements, using Cusicanqui's model of hybridity. Although many texts have been written about non-white, postcolonial and Latin American feminism (Alfaro 2010; Burman 2011; Caballero 2019; Day 2008; Ewig 2018; Guzmán and Triana 2019; Rousseau 2011; Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2015; Villaroel Peña 2018), my theorizing will be primarily based on the work of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, an Aymara sociologist, historian of anarchism, and herself feminist and anarchist. As I discuss in detail below, Cusicanqui has formulated an alternative model of hybridity based on the local experience of Bolivian indigenous and social movements (Cusicanqui 2010; 2012; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2018). In my analysis, I will use Cusicanqui's concept of *ch'ixi*. For Cusicanqui, the concept of *ch'ixi* is an analytical tool for theorizing about the mixing of cultures that retain distinct aspects but enter a

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mutual creative dialogue and create new qualities through it (Cusicanqui 2012). Cusicanqui's *ch'ixi* world reflects the complementary heterogeneity of Andean societies and provide a theoretical framework based on authentic local indigenous experience.

Cusicanqui is one of the first generation of indigenous intellectuals who formed the Katarist movement.¹ She is also the first Quechua-Aymara radical anarcho-feminist. She was persecuted and imprisoned by the military regimes of the 1970s for her academic work, in which she pointed out the oppression of Quechua and Aymara peasants (Gago 2016). Cusicanqui is one of the first postcolonial Latin American thinkers. She rejects theories based on Western epistemologies and creates alternative perspectives based on the bodily experience of the unprivileged: indigenous peasants, poor working people and, primarily, indigenous women.

Cusicanqui rejects any form of (neo)colonialism. The central concept in her work is radical decolonisation: liberation from both the external (neo)colonisation and internal colonisation that permeate Bolivian society from the elites to the disadvantaged and oppressed. She has sharply criticised Bolivian academics in this regard for uncritically adopting Western concepts and theories, whose application to the Bolivian reality constitutes just another form of symbolic colonialism for her (Cusicanqui et al 2016).

In 1983, Cusicanqui and her students at Universidad Mayor de San Andrés founded the Andean Oral History Workshop (El Taller de Historia Oral Andina) in which they began to develop methodologies on how to do science using the oral construction of knowledge. For Cusicanqui, reconstructing history through the eyes of the oppressed and underprivileged is a form of decolonial practice. She rejects the linear concept of time as a concept implanted by hegemonic Western science. Instead, she advocates for a cyclical understanding of time based on Andean epistemology. "There is no 'post' or 'pre' in this vision of history that is neither linear nor teleological, but rather moves in cycles and spirals and sets out on a course without neglecting to return to the same point" (Cusicanqui 2012). For the underprivileged, history

¹ The katarist movement arose in the late 1960s. It promoted indigenous (mainly Aymara and Quechua) ethno-nationalist agenda (Van Cott 2008).

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therefore constitutes the cyclical renewal of various forms of colonialism (Cusicanqui 2010; 2015; 2018).



Figure 1: *Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui.*

Source: *Dulfano, Isabel.* 2014. "Decolonizing the Person, the Image and the Collective Global Psyche Through the Lens of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui." *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine*. Accessed [April 20, 2022]. <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/decolonizing-person-image-and-collective-global-psyche>

As such, Cusicanqui considers capitalism and consumerism to be just another form of patriarchal colonialism. Cusicanqui formed Tambo Colectivo 2 to diagnose and confront it. This is a subversive and emancipatory space where, together with 16 other social scientists, she produces alternative knowledge based on independent research into the contemporary social reality in Bolivia (Dulfano 2014). She is also involved in social activism: she promotes the use and revitalisation of indigenous

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languages, practices, and rituals within Tambo Colectivo 2, as well as traditional methods of subsistence, which she sees as one of the ways of dealing with environmental degradation (Dulfano 2014). Cusicanqui is currently involved in educational activities through the *Colectivx Ch'ixi*² (Cusicanqui 2015, 300).

For Cusicanqui, feminism constitutes a tool of decolonial practice. The oppression of indigenous people and the oppression of women are based on the same principles: both identities have been defined from the outside by oppressive colonial structures (Narváez 2019). Resistance therefore lies in self-definition and in the revitalisation of their own forms of thinking, knowledge, and epistemology (Cusicanqui 2010; 2018).

This text aims to contribute to this decolonial practice by analysing insurgent and anti-authoritarian Bolivian feminist currents through Cusicanqui's subversive theory.

Anarcho-syndicalism, anarcho-feminism and the *ch'ixi* world

Cusicanqui has been strongly influenced in her theorising and work by the ideas of anarchism. Anarchism had a considerable impact on the peripheral or semi-industrial zones of the postcolonial world in the first decades of the 20th century (Laforcade 2020, 21). In South America, anarchism influenced the formation, practices, and strategies of social movements to a greater extent than almost anywhere else. Anarchist practice enabled heterogeneous groups such as workers movements, ethnic communities, women's organisations and urban artists and intellectuals to link together into joint action. Anarchism thus left a significant mark on the anti-authoritarian politics of the local left. In this regard, the Andean regions are a good example of "the immersion of twentieth century anarchists in the struggles of indigenous societies against colonial structures of domination" (Laforcade 2020, 22). The anti-colonial discourses of anarchists and indigenous peoples were, in fact, very close to one another and them "cross-fertilised" each other (Laforcade 2020, 26). This was also the case with Bolivian social and indigenous movements (Cusicanqui and Knoll 2007).

² Cusicanqui intentionally changes the spelling of Spanish words by inserting the letter "x" into them. She symbolically colonizes the Spanish language by introducing elements used in transcription of Aymara language.

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The anarchist movement emerged in Bolivia in the early 20th century and peaked between the 1920s and 1940s. The first anarcho-syndicalist groups, the FOL (the Local Labour Federation - Federación obrera local) and the FOI (the International Labour Federation - Federación obrera internacional), were formed within the nascent Bolivian workers' movement. The Women's Labour Federation (Federación obrera femenina) was created as a part of the FOL group as early as in 1927. Indigenous urban migrant women became the main driving force in the anarchist movement (Cusicanqui 2014; Laforcade 2020, 19).

As Cusicanqui points out, Bolivian anarcho-syndicalism created a "public counter-sphere, formed by unions and guild communities, densely interwoven into networks of kinship, socio-territorial belonging and clientele" (Cusicanqui 2020, 125) that was able to question the exclusive oligarchic (state) power. These autonomous practices combined several levels of historical experience: in many of the craft-based guild communities, territorial and ayllu³ belongings overlapped with a wide range of urban and mercantile practices. Cusicanqui refers to these symbolic spaces, within which different levels of belonging are combined, as *ch'ixi* anarcho-syndicalism (Cusicanqui 2020, 126).

The Aymara world *ch'ixi* plays a key role here. It expresses "the Aymara idea of something that is and is not at the same time, that is, the logic of the third included. A *ch'ixi* grey is white and not white at the same time; it is white, and it is also black, i.e. its opposite. *Ch'ixi* combines the Indian world with its opposite, without ever mixing with it" (Cusicanqui 2010, 69-70). According to Cusicanqui, however, there are great differences between *ch'ixi* and hybrid phenomena. Hybridity (Bhabha 1994; Canclini 1995; Gilroy 1993) presupposes the possibility that by mixing two different entities a completely new third entity may emerge, capable of "merging the features of its ancestors into an unprecedented and harmonious whole" (Cusicanqui 2010, 70). By contrast, the phenomena of *ch'ixi* "presuppose the parallel coexistence of many cultural differences that do not merge but antagonise or complement each other. Each of them reproduces itself from the depths of the past and is contentiously related to the others" (Cusicanqui 2010, 70). The term *ch'ixi* thus transcends the

³ Ayllu is a synonym for a self-sufficient Andean community.

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binarism and historicism of hegemonic social science and captures the heterogeneity of the Andean societies and social movements (Cusicanqui 2018, 17).

Laforcade and Hirsch (2020, 11) point out that the principles of organisation that Cusicanqui calls *ch'ixi* anarcho-syndicalism were reborn in the structure of social movements at the turn of the millennium. These movements, defined ethnically, culturally, or socially, often created knowledge and experience "which bears little resemblance to European anarchist discourse, but communes with many of its concepts" (Laforcade and Hirsch 2020, 12). The emphasis on a horizontal structure, the principles of direct democracy, the affinity of the members of the movement, the cooperation of different belongings and identities, the rejection of the power of the state and a fundamental belief in direct action were "anarchistic without being explicitly anarchist" (Laforcade and Hirsch 2020, 12). Cusicanqui argues that the fundamental contribution of this *ch'ixi* anarchism lies in its "radical defence and respect for the freedom and autonomy of the individual, who can and needs to coexist within a community ethos, whether inherited or reinvented" (Cusicanqui 2020, 123).

Women, Indian hegemony and alternative modernity

The strategies of social movements at the turn of the millennium have had a *ch'ixi* characteristic. They have combined different levels of experience and knowledge based on indigenous and workers' struggles. A specific women's experience has also played an important role in both cases. Equipped with multiple experiences of oppression as Indians, as women and as poor workers, Aymara and Quechua women have been able to use a wide range of knowledge to form and use networks between organisations based on all these categories. Their different but complementary levels of belonging have created a *ch'ixi* space where seemingly antagonistic identities have been transformed into multifaceted means of combat.

During the gas war mobilisations in 2003, women took part in street fights using specifically female means: the use of kitchen utensils as weapons or keeping their spouses (police officers) at home and preventing them from participating in repressive actions against the protesters (Alfaro 2010, 225). However, they also mobilised as members of trade unions, professional associations, and indigenous and local communities. By engaging a multilevel web of identities and belonging in the struggle, women emerged as an important political entity (Alfaro 2010) and their

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participation in the uprising was crucial to destabilising the current political status quo.

Women also brought basic principles of Andean ayllu into play (Alfaro 2010, 225): i.e. consensus, reciprocity, and horizontality. The use of female means of combat meant that women made the ayllu principles of complementary balance visible in the public space. In this way, they created a space for what Cusicanqui calls the *Indian hegemony*, which paradoxically grows "in the spaces created by the invader's culture: the market, the state and the union" (Cusicanqui 2010, 73).

According to Cusicanqui, the spaces of *Indian hegemony* constitute a source of an alternative version of modernity, a key principle of decolonisation. The hegemonic concept of Bolivian modernity of the 20th century was based on the ideology of white-mestizo-patriarchal citizenship. Indians and women were excluded from the modernity in this masculine colonial project, and they were virtually erased from the narratives of the Bolivian elites (Moore Torres 2018, 245). The oppressed were reduced to "subjects of their own historicity" (Cusicanqui 2015, 96), which was the way of suppressing and neutralising the autonomist demands of the indigenous groups, as well as the libertarian gestures of the anarchist and socialist groups in the cities (Cusicanqui 2015, 96). Cusicanqui insists that Morales' plurinational project has continued this internal colonialism by involving certain elements of "Indianness" in the construction of the Bolivian identity merely to exploit its symbolic value in support of state capitalism (Weinberg 2014). By creating spaces of *Indian hegemony* within the territory defined by the dominant patriarchal and (neo)colonial structures, the oppressed, women, indigenous communities or poor urban mestizo people have radically questioned the dominant power discourse, broken free from their imprisonment in historicity and reclaimed their own modernity (Goodale 2006). According to Cusicanqui (2015), the process of decolonisation consists precisely of the recognition of other modernities that allow the emergence of other epistemologies "that challenge the dichotomous logic of modernity-coloniality, thinking-doing, body-reason, nature-culture, occident – not occident" (Moore Torres 2018, 245).

Women have thus played a key role in the process of disrupting the state patriarchal and (neo)colonial hegemony by creating subversive networks of alternative versions of modernity. Their specific roles and professions mean that women are "the creators of languages and symbols that can seduce the "other" and establishing reciprocity and coexistence pacts between different social entities" (Cusicanqui 2010, 72).

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These practices of women "make it possible to complement the homeland – a territory with a dynamic cultural fabric that unfolds and reproduces itself until it encompasses the border and mixed sectors – the *ch'ixi* sectors – that contribute with their vision of the personal responsibility, privacy and individual rights associated with citizenship" (Cusicanqui 2010, 72–73).

***Ch'ixi* anarcho-feminism: Mujeres Creando**

The Mujeres Creando (Women Creating) movement originated in one of the peripheral neighbourhoods of La Paz in 1992. Its founders, María Galindo, Mónica Mendoza and Julieta Paredes, combined their experiences from different social backgrounds, being both of Aymara and white middle-class origin. The movement arose primarily as a protest the neoliberal consensus spreading through Bolivian society in the 1980s. However, Mujeres Creando also sharply criticised the traditional Bolivian left for its machismo and patriarchal power structure that considered women "to be logistical support, a free workforce, sexual loot, a mass that operates the mobilisations, but which is not taken into account" (Mujeres Creando 2020a). The goal of the movement was thus not only to challenge neoliberalism, but also to fight against all forms of patriarchal oppression.

As a radical feminist movement, Mujeres Creando opened up topics that had been taboo in Bolivian society: the right of a woman to decide over her own body, the right to have an abortion and the right to reject the traditional role of a wife, mother and caregiver. At the same time, they also demanded legal recognition of the economic value of housework. The movement also promoted the rights of sexual minorities, which were harshly ignored in then Catholic-oriented, conservative, homophobic Bolivia.

Although they promoted an explicitly feminist agenda, Mujeres Creando opposed middle class feminist groups in Bolivia, as it considered them to be instruments of the traditional socio-economic elite that, instead of helping to improve the social conditions of indigenous and urban poor women, contributed to maintaining the patriarchal and racially unequal system that promotes the conservative family model and the traditional role of women within it (Falquet 2013; Galindo and Valdez 2020). Likewise, the movement also rejected the concept of gender equality and women's rights promoted by non-governmental organisations, for through it "the strength and

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work of women was used as a 'shock absorber' for the social costs related to the neoliberal structural settings of Bolivian society" (Galindo and Valdez 2020).



Figure 2: Graffiti: "I don't come from your rib, you come from my crotch".

Source: *Grafiteada. Mujeres Creando*. Accessed [May 28, 2022].

<http://mujerescreando.com/index.php/component/content/article/94-graffitis/133-grafiteada-de-semana-santa?Itemid=437#galleryd1a4e77218-1>

Mujeres Creando gradually developed several types of activities. The tool that they first began to use to spread their ideas was graffiti and different kinds of street performances. They used the streets and public spaces as a means of communicating with society (Morales, Patricio and Roque 2016). Their graffiti, written in characteristic handwriting and always signed with the movement's logo, often provoked sharp controversy by opening taboo topics in public spaces (for example the wall inscription "I don't come from your rib, you come from my crotch"⁴ (Galindo 2021a). Currently, the movement also spreads its ideas through Radio

⁴ *No vengo de tu costilla, vienes de mi entrepierna.*

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Deseo.⁵ Mujeres Creando manages two autonomous community centres: La Virgen de los Deseos (The Virgin of Wishes) in the city of La Paz and Los Deseos de la Virgen (The Wishes of the Virgin) in the city of Santa Cruz. There, they organise cultural, political, and charitable events, provide accommodation and offer food based on traditional indigenous dishes (Mujeres Creando 2020b).



Figure 3: 13 Hours of Rebellion.

Source: 13 Horas de rebellion. 2015. "13 Horas de rebelión, de María Galindo." XXIV Muestra Internacional de Cine realizado por Mujeres-Zaragoza. [May 29, 2022].
<https://www.muestracinemujereszgz.org/13-horas-de-rebellion-de-maria-galindo/>

Mujeres Creando's street performances or protest marches are often associated with various ways of masking or exposing women's bodies. As an example, it is worth mentioning the Feminist Catwalk (Pasarela Feminista) organised in the city of Santa

⁵ <http://radiodeseo.com/>

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Cruz in 2014. Santa Cruz is the traditional centre of Bolivia's conservative socio-economic elite. There, Mujeres Creando prepared an improvised catwalk in front of the main cathedral as an ironic reminder of the patriarchal system's preferred standards of beauty. Several dozen activists paraded just like models and used provocative costumes to point to the objectification of women, double moral standards, and sexism. They promoted the right of women to be happy in their (indigenous) bodies, such as they are. A film called 13 Hours of Rebellion (13 Horas de la Rebelión) was made during the event and the movement subsequently presented it at several international festivals (Mujeres Creando 2020c).



Figure 4: The Blasphemous Altar (La Paz).

Source: Díaz DE Oropeza, Adrián. 2016. "El día de la mujer boliviana arremeten contra la Iglesia Católica. Mural de protesta contra el catolicismo crea polémica en la Ciudad de La Paz." *La Izquierda Diario*. Accessed [May 26, 2022]. <https://www.laizquierdadiario.com.bo/Mural-de-protesta-contra-el-catolicismo-crea-polemica-en-la-ciudad-de-La-Paz>

In 2016, upon the occasion of the International Biennial of Art, Mujeres Creando created a mural called the Blasphemous Altar on the facade of the National Art Museum in La Paz, thereby "breaking the idea of the Museum as an interior space and intervening the narrative of colonial altars to install a feminist discourse" (Galindo 2017a). Mujeres Creando used traditional religious symbols in the Blasphemous Altar and gave them new, subversive meanings (Flores 2020). The mural was

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dominated by a crucified woman accompanied by the inscription "Hail Mary full of rebellion."⁶ Next to it, a figure of Jesus was painted hunched under a cross of penises. At the base of the altar, there was a depiction of a masturbating pope in the middle of two inscriptions: "Your church crucifies women every day, feminism resuscitates them"⁷ and "May God be an orphan without a mother or a virgin"⁸ (El Desconcierto 2017).



Figure 5: *The Miraculous Blasphemous Altar (Quito).*

Source: *Mujeres Creando*. 2018. "Mujeres Creando Insert: La creatividad es un instrumento de lucha y el cambio social un hecho creativo." *Afterall*. Accessed [May 29, 2022]. <https://www.afterall.org/article/mujeres-creando-insert>

⁶ *Ave María llena eres de rebeldía.*

⁷ *Tu iglesia crucifica mujeres cada día, el feminismo las resuscita.*

⁸ *Que Dios se quede huerfano sin madre ni virgen.*

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The mural was supposed to be exhibited throughout the biennial, but it only lasted a few hours. It was considered too provocative and "excessively transgressive of the principles of Christianity" (Flores 2020) by some viewers, so they destroyed it and repainted it white. However, the mural was realised two more times. In 2017, the mural was exhibited at the Quito Metropolitan Cultural Centre. New figures appeared on the mural, whose graphic design was inspired by the drawings of Guaman Poma de Ayala: a bisexual Virgin Mary with female and male genitals, holding the Sun and the Moon in her/his hands as a symbolic expression of her/his bisexuality, and the Ovarian Virgin (Virgen de los ovarios) stylised in the form of an ovary. The mural exhibition was closed after two days due to institutional censorship. The next realisation took place in Santiago de Chile, at the Salvador Allende Museum. There, a figure of a masturbating General Pinochet was added next to the pope on the mural, along with the inscription: "Opus Dei and the dictatorship singing hallelujah together".⁹ The mural finally remained uncensored in Santiago (Flores 2020).



Figure 6: The Miraculous Blasphemous Altar (Santiago de Chile).

Source: Flores, Pamela. 2020. "Reflexiones en torno a los murales blasfemos del colectivo Mujeres Creando." *Seminario de Estudios sobre Narrativa Latinoamericana Contemporánea*. Accessed [May 29, 2022]. <https://www.senalc.com/2020/06/01/reflexiones-en-torno-a-los-murales-blasfemos-del-colectivo-mujeres-creando/>

⁹ *Opus Dei y dictadura cantaron juntas Aleluya.*

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In addition to artistic performances, Mujeres Creando also engages in publishing and research activities. The publications by authors associated with the movement focus on the education and emancipation of women. Mujeres Creando's books help women identify and face domestic violence from their husbands (Gutierrez 2012; 2020), they remove the taboo of female sexuality and inform women about situations where it is legal to undergo an abortion, which is otherwise illegal in Bolivia (Mujeres Creando 2019, Ojeda Marguay and Quispe Paredes 2014). To promote women's rights at the political level, Mujeres Creando drafted an alternative Feminist Political Constitution of the State (Constitución Política Feminista del Estado) that enshrines the right of women to make decisions over their own bodies and to reject marriage, the maternal role and the obligatory heterosexual norms (Galindo 2010).



Figure 7: *Neither the Womb Open nor the Mouth Closed.*

Source: Libros. In Mujeres Creando. Accessed [May 29, 2022].
<http://mujerescreando.org/category/publicaciones/libros/>

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Independent social science research is yet another tool, through which *Mujeres Creando* explores the power inequalities of the patriarchal system. It is worth mentioning the series of interviews on the topic of sexuality that they did with members of the Bolivian parliament in 2017. The authors used this research to question and disrupt the dogma of social science research, which, in their opinion, is focused primarily on the lower social classes and ignores privileged groups. *Mujeres Creando* used independent research as a "weapon of the weak" (Scott 1985) to temporarily overturn the patriarchal power structure. It was underprivileged women who interviewed the members of the political class with power (Moreno 2017). Although the research was stopped prematurely by a parliamentary official, *Mujeres Creando* managed to interview almost half the elected officials. The researchers identified ubiquitous homophobic prejudices across the political spectrum (Galindo 2017b). According to *Mujeres Creando*, the attitude towards sexuality is a good indicator of how Bolivian political representation works. María Galindo states: "What happens, if the Guaraní indigenous deputy, for example, says the same thing as the white neoliberal deputy? Or if an indigenous woman adopts the discourse of the Church? It means that these people do not represent us, they replace us" (Moreno 2017).

The List of Irresponsible Fathers (*Lista de Padres Irresponsables*) is another tool used by *Mujeres Creando* to reverse the patriarchal power structure. Since 2010, *Radio Deseo* has published a monthly list of fathers who refuse to pay child support (BBC 2010; *Radio Deseo* 2022). They publish the names of men who have committed physical abuse against their partners on another list. In this way, *Mujeres Creando* exposes irresponsible men to public humiliation. Being published on the list is greatly feared, especially by middle-class men who worry about incurring damage to their social prestige. The list has thus become a weapon of the weak, a tool for otherwise powerless women to claim their rights and regain their dignity (BBC 2010; *Radio Deseo* 2022).

Mujeres Creando promotes a multi-level, *ch'ixi* agenda: they are artists, social and environmental activists, educators, researchers, radio presenters and promoters of radical feminism. They oppose neoliberalism at an ideological level, but also the patriarchal structures of Bolivian society across the political spectrum. The movement rejects power inequalities based on social class differences, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. In their struggle, *Mujeres Creando* combines different, often seemingly contradictory identities and belongings: they fight for the emancipation of

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women, indigenous people, non-heterosexual and non-binary people and the working class, using the tools of anarchism and punk subculture.

Mujeres Creando has created a subversive network connecting different, seemingly disparate groups. Galindo refers to these strategic alliances as "unusual alliances", (*alianzas insólitas*) (Kozak Rovero 2020). Rather than a unified movement, Mujeres Creando has created a social fabric that makes it possible to form political alliances between women "with whom it is forbidden to form alliances" (Morales, Patricio and Roque 2016, 226). One of the controversial pieces of graffiti by Mujeres Creando well describes these forbidden alliances among women: "We are Indians, whores and lesbians, revolted and twined together" (Galindo 2018). For example, Mujeres Creando has cooperated with the organisation OMESPRO (Organisation of Women in Prostitution) and jointly prepared a project on the law on self-managed brothels (Galindo and Valdez 2020).

Unusual alliances connect women of all ages and social classes: indigenous women, poor urban women, middle-class intellectuals, students, artists, trade unionists etc. This complementary heterogeneity is one of the features of Cusicanqui's *ch'ixi* world, in which seemingly opposing elements can coexist and cooperate without being mutually exclusive.

Through unusual alliances, Mujeres Creando uses its indigenous experience to create a network based on the Andean principles of horizontality, reciprocity, and complementarity. This network has emerged from a marginalised urban environment, a space created by colonial society, but it has the potential to subversively challenge the ideology of colonialism and to radically question the dominant discourse of power. In this regard, the network of unusual alliances has opened a space for Cusicanqui's Indian hegemony, through which Mujeres Creando promotes an alternative vision of modernity based on the experience of the underprivileged: women, indigenous people, poor working people or non-heterosexual people.

María Galindo

María Galindo, one of the founders of the movement and its most influential representative, embodies Cusicanqui's *ch'ixi* world. Galindo comes from an elite middle-class family, but she has resigned her social position and devoted herself to the underprivileged. She is greatly influenced by the ideas of anarchism and punk:

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"although I was born into an upper middle-class family, the direction I took in my life was socially downward instead of upward" (Galindo and Valdez 2020). She characterises herself as a "dweller in abnormality" (Galindo 2020). Her controversial opinions led her to break up with her family and she was forced to leave Bolivia in the 1980s (Galindo and Valdez 2020). Paradoxically, she fled to Vatican, where she also completed her university studies. Galindo is now a psychologist, university teacher, radio presenter, writer, and screenwriter. She has openly declared herself a lesbian and an atheist and she has been imprisoned several times and persecuted by the Bolivian police because of her controversial street performances (Morales, Patricio and Roque 2016). She is the author of several books, in which she has elaborated her ideas on what she calls *bastard feminism* (Galindo 2007; 2013; 2021b).

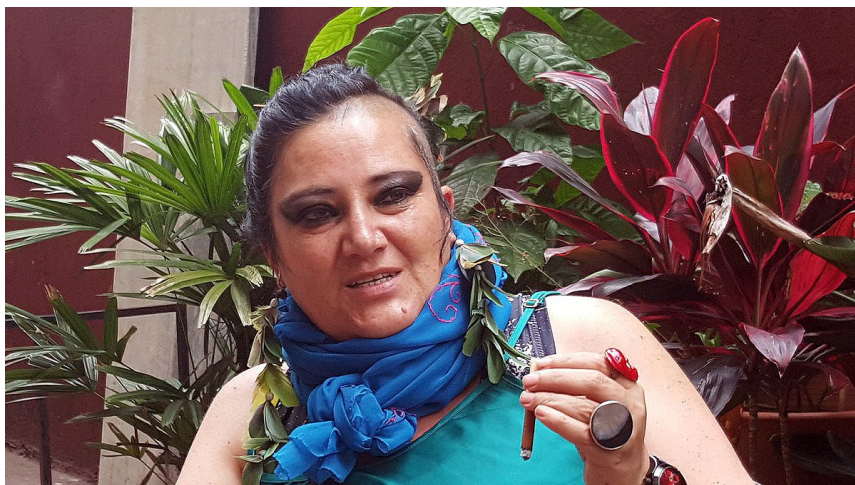


Figure 8: *María Galindo.*

Source: Morales, Alana, Patricio, Mariana, and Tatiana Roque. "Entrevista da vez Maria Galindo." *Revista DR*. Accessed [May 29. 2022]. <https://revistadr.com.br/posts/maria-galindo/>

For Galindo, *bastard feminism* is intuitive feminism, based not on an ideological, but on an existential basis (Galindo and Valdez 2020). She rejects what she calls Eurocentric feminism, but at the same time she also refuses to talk about Bolivian feminism. In her opinion, real feminism exceeds the category of a nation state. The

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state is an instrument of patriarchal oppression (Guzmán Arroyo 2019). Its very nature means that the liberation of women can never come from it.

For Galindo, there are two core principles in feminism: decolonisation and depatriarchalisation. Feminism is therefore not merely an ideology, but it is rooted in the everyday practice and struggle of women against oppression and exploitation in the family, against femicide and machismo. The promotion of sexual freedoms and the right of women to decide over their own bodies play a key role in this struggle. For Galindo, the body is the fundamental basis of our experience: "the body is the main reality that we live in, in a society without a body. Patriarchy is the annulment of the body, capitalism is the confinement of the body and tyrannies over bodies constitute the basis for the consolidation of all other tyrannies. The separation of the mind and the body, which lies at the very basis of patriarchal thinking, involves the subjugation of the body" (Galindo and Valdez 2020). The body, bodily experience and liberation of the body therefore lie at the centre of her feminist politics.

Galindo offers "a poetic counter-current" in her performances (Kozak Rovero 2020). She opposes "the racial and sexual purification of the body" (Preciado 2019) and questions the norms of beauty and normality set by colonial history and maintained by contemporary neocolonialism, capitalism, and consumerism by presenting indigenous bodies in their diversity and originality. She uses cheap and broken objects to create new symbolic meanings through their novel combination. Galindo also often uses traditional patriarchal and religious symbols and gives them new provocative and often disgraceful meanings (Preciado 2019). She believes that art should return from the commercial and commodified spaces of museums and galleries to public spaces, to the streets and squares, and should engage in serving the people (Preciado 2019).

Galindo criticises religious institutions and dominant centres of power. She strongly questions heteronormativity and denounces various forms of symbolic and physical violence based on homophobic prejudices. However, Galindo wants activism and the struggle to primarily be a joy and a pleasure. She opposes patrimonialization, "a practice that exalts heroism and martyrdom" (Kozak Romero 2020). Instead of celebrating the martyrdom of women who have suffered from femicide and abuse, she proposes to celebrate their lives and focus on improving the conditions of living people.

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Like Cusicanqui, Galindo is critical of the academic environment in her capacity as a staunch anarchist activist. She points to the epistemological hegemony that universities have created: "the academy, as an institution legitimised by society, submits to a process of translating the most diverse social movements and, especially, the indigenous communities into its own terms" (Kozak Rovero 2020). Although Galindo once worked as a university professor, she felt too limited in that position. She considers universities to be a space for the upper classes and the elite, distant from the daily struggles of unprivileged people (Morales, Patricio and Roque 2016). She is now continuing her pedagogical activities within the Mujeres Creando community. Mujeres Creando charges for any research interviews conducted with them by academics to fight against what she calls "epistemological extractivism" (Kozak Rovero 2020) and they use the acquired funds to maintain the activities at their autonomous centres.

Galindo and her *bastard feminism* personify Cusicanqui's idea of *ch'ixi* phenomena. Galindo is an atheist, lesbian, anarchist, artist, street performer, radio presenter and educator. She promotes sexual freedom, but also responsibility towards the partner, family, and community. She comes from a middle-class elite, but she fights for the rights of indigenous and poor women and men. She rejects the institution of the state, but she is also the co-author of the state's alternative Feminist Political Constitution. Galindo's bastard feminism transcends the symbolic boundaries of social groups, nationalities, and ideologies, but at the same time it is also anchored in the local cultural and linguistic tradition (for example, Galindo rejects the label LGBTIQ+ as a Western construct and prefers the local term "cuestión marica") (Torres Cautivo 2021).

Seemingly mutually exclusive experiences in Galindo's mottled *ch'ixi* identity conduct a creative dialogue with each other. Galindo's feminism is local and cosmopolitan, indigenous and non-indigenous, individual and communitarian at the same time. She challenges the dichotomous logic of Western thinking and presents a decolonial and depatriarchal epistemology, where opposites do not have to be mutually exclusive, but can coexist harmoniously and create new, non-dichotomous qualities.

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"We are Indians, Whores and Lesbians, Revolted and Twined Together". Decolonial Feminism in Bolivia**Julieta Paredes and Adriana Guzmán: Aymara Community Feminism**

The Mujeres Creando Comunidad movement split off from Mujeres Creando in 2003. Its founder, Julieta Paredes, is an Aymara intellectual, writer, poet, singer and songwriter. She is openly lesbian (Falconí Trávez 2015; Guzmán and Triana 2019). She and Adriana Guzmán, a pedagogue and social activist (Guzmán Arroyo 2022), have become the main promoters of Aymara community feminism in Bolivia.



Figure 9: Julieta Paredes and Adriana Guzmán.

Source: Paredes Carvajal, Julieta. 2013. "Disidencia y Feminismo Comunitario." *Disidencia 10* (2). Accessed [May 10, 2022].

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170805222058/http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/es/e-misferica-102/paredes>

Paredes' feminism is rooted in the spaces of the Indian hegemony that emerged during the social protests at the turn of the millennium. Paredes participated in the street fighting during the 2003 Gas War and addressed the women who took an active part in the uprising. According to her, by fighting the neoliberal system, which she considers to constitute just another form of patriarchal colonialism, which (as Cusicanqui 2010; 2015; 2018) claims - constantly renews itself, these women were putting radical feminism into practice, albeit without considering themselves feminists. Together with these engaged women's groups, Paredes initiated the establishment of the Feminist Assembly, through which they became interconnected and able to coordinate their activities (Daly 2010).

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The Mujeres Creando Comunidad movement has followed the ideas developed by Mujeres Creando: they consider depatriarchalisation and decolonisation to be key principles of women's liberation. However, Paredes and Guzmán's feminism focuses primarily on community: they propose community feminism (*feminismo comunitario*), within which they emphasize the dynamics of the relationship between the individual and the community and women and men in community.

According to Paredes, the whole community is more than just the sum of its individual parts. The community is made up of women and men as two "necessary, complementary, non-hierarchical halves" (Paredes 2013, 87) that are autonomous from each other. The fact that the community is a systemically interconnected whole means that "the suppression and subordination of one-part harms the other as well" (Paredes 2013, 87). When women, who make up half the community, are not allowed to develop their potential, the whole community is damaged. And, because men are also part of the community, they oppress themselves when they oppress women (Paredes 2013, 87).

However, it is also possible to apply the same logic to other, not only gender, aspects of the community: a community can only function harmoniously, if none of its members is deprived of the opportunity to develop meaningfully as an autonomous, yet interconnected unit. From this point of view, any form of oppression has a destructive effect on the community, whether it is social, ethical, racial or other. In Paredes' view, the community is a *ch'ixi* space that challenges the Western dichotomy of the individual and the communal: the systemic connection between the individual and the communal creates a "third", non-binary aspect of the community.

Individual communities do not exist in a vacuum. By themselves, they represent autonomous, yet interconnected complementary units. Julieta Paredes presents the idea of the Bolivian nation as a community of complementary and reciprocally interconnected communities. However, this "fabric of complementarities, reciprocities, identities, individualities and autonomies" (Paredes 2013, 90) goes far beyond national borders. Communities defined locally, ethnically, professionally, and otherwise should be interconnected regardless of their nationality and should create together a community of communities that is, according to Paredes, synonymous with humanity.

Paredes has formulated a political proposal for the emancipation of women within her perspective of community feminism. The proposal is based on a conceptual

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framework built on the interconnected cycle of "5 fields of action for the struggle of women in rural and urban communities" (Paredes 2013, 99-100): body – space – time – movement – memory.

The body is the central principle in this cycle. Both Paredes and Galindo reject the dualistic understanding of the soul and body as an alien, colonial concept. On the contrary, Paredes understands body as a fundamental element that is the source of both corporeality and spirituality. Therefore, we should love our corporeality such as it is. However, Paredes points out that the current concept of corporeality has been strongly influenced by internal colonialism, which has created a racist ethical and aesthetic imagery (Cusicanqui 2015; Paredes 2013, 53) that determines the perception of beauty and social prestige. White women or women with European traits have become the norm, while women with indigenous traits "are considered ugly, dirty and uneducated" (Paredes 2013, 54). Community feminists are "tired of a colonial aesthetic of white as beautiful, tired of the frivolous spectacle of bodies that are exhibited for macho consumption" (Paredes 2013, 101). To liberate indigenous women's bodies from this symbolic violence, it is necessary to decolonise the imagery of the body and depatriarchalize the concept of the body as a mere object for the satisfaction of male needs.

Julieta Paredes has deconstructed the very concept of gender in this regard. According to her, socialisation and the learning of a male and female gender implies the internalisation of unequal power relations, as the male gender is perceived as being superior to the female gender and is built up at its expense. She considers gender to be a political category created by men to strengthen the patriarchal system regardless of whether this involves a colonial or neoliberal patriarchy. She therefore considers the idea of gender equality to be unrealistic, because by their very nature hierarchically structured roles can never be equal. In this sense, she has compared gender categories to social classes, which are "founded on the injustice of the exploitation of one class over another" (Paredes 2013, 65). Paredes thus suggests overcoming gender as an unjust historical reality and socialising children outside gender categories, because gender is a "prison built on the human body" (Paredes and Guzmán 2014, 74).

The body is closely connected with Paredes' vision of spatiality. Paredes' community feminism emphasises the body-territory metaphor. It is necessary to decolonise and depatriarchalize both the territory-body and the physical territory-land. Paredes deals

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with the extended physicality of the subject (Moore Torres 2018, 249) who is an integral part of the wider community in both a social and a territorial sense.

Neither the territory nor the body are commodifiable. The territory, Mother Earth, enables a harmonious community life, while the community must in turn take care of the Earth. In this sense, "sexual oppression and colonial dominance represent two sides of the same repression" (Moore Torres 2018, 249). Just as patriarchal capitalism plunders natural resources, it also exploits the bodies of women that are used as a source of unpaid domestic labour, a means of reproduction and caregivers in the same way (Moore Torres 2018, 249).

Paredes has drawn attention to the systemic abuse of women: as a witness to the social consequences of Bolivia's neoliberal transformation in the 1980s, she has pointed out that most of the social responsibilities relinquished by the state have been transferred to women's shoulders. Women have been forced to provide for their families in times of massive unemployment caused by the privatisation of state-owned enterprises. Women have been forced to work in precarious conditions as cheap labour without any social security and adequate overtime pay. Subsequently, it has been the women who have sustained the network of the informal economy, which is paradoxically the dominant sector in the overall Bolivian economy (Paredes 2013, 59). It was the poor indigenous women – the most vulnerable – who were the hardest hit by the neoliberal reforms. Paredes has therefore advocated for decolonisation, depatriarchalisation and the re-establishment of reciprocity: the fair redistribution of symbolic and physical values both within the community (whether local or national) and between the community and its natural environment.

In this regard, Paredes has also pointed to the unequal distribution of time, i.e. the dominant dimension that determines our existence, between men and women. Men, who usurp the public space, spend "important time" (*el tiempo importante*) there, while women are expelled to a private space, where they are forced to spend "unimportant time" (*el tiempo no importante*) (Paredes 2013, 109). Paradoxically, they use this unimportant time to provide all the activities that are indispensable for the preservation and reproduction of the family and the community. These daily, repetitive, and backbreaking activities are not remunerated or otherwise symbolically evaluated. Yet everyday life (attributed to women) and historicity (attributed to men) both form part of one continuum. Overemployed women would therefore regain their time for rest and regeneration, as well as for the purposes of organising politically in the movement.

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Paredes compares the movement to a social body whose goal is to achieve a good life (*vivir bien*). The movement is a never-ending dynamic process (Paredes 2013, 112), because the moment the set goals are achieved, new goals and requirements appear.¹⁰ The movement should be based on the horizontal complementarity between women both within and between communities at different levels, be they local, regional, professional, or other. Through this network of horizontal and non-hierarchical relationships, women can achieve their demands at both the local, national, and international levels.

Memory is the last symbolic field that community feminists want to depatriarchalize and decolonise (Guzmán Arroyo 2019). Paredes criticizes the concept of a "long memory" (Cusicanqui 1984) that traces the source of contemporary indigenous identities to the pre-Columbian (pre-invasion) period and, according to her, glorifies it uncritically. Although this period is a source of pride for the Aymara identity, the "long memory" of women and men differs, because even in the pre-Columbian cultures there were patriarchal structures that were oppressive to women. The "long memory" of women should therefore be based not only on "the knowledge of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers and their technical, biotechnological and scientific contributions... to humanity" (Paredes 2013, 117), but also on the experience of the anti-patriarchal resistance of "female rebels" (Paredes 2013, 117).

Oppressive structures persist in today's indigenous communities, where the relationship between men and women is still often hierarchical, unequal, and unjust (Moore Torres 2018, 250). The ways in which the indigenous patriarchy interacts with modern forms of patriarchal oppression can be described in terms of the cyclical temporality used by Cusicanqui: from the point of view of the "long memory" of oppressed women, the patriarchy is repeatedly renewed and takes on new forms.

Julieta Paredes calls the layering of indigenous and (neo)colonial forms of patriarchy a "patriarchal connection"¹¹ (Paredes 2013, 71). She points out that pre-Columbian cultures are not a historical source of equality between women and men. She criticises the Aymara "chacha-warmi" concept of the complementarity of male and

¹⁰ Trotskyist influences resonate in this view of the movement. In addition to Marxism and anarchism, Trotskyism was one of the ideological currents that influenced the Bolivian workers' movement.

¹¹ *entronque patriarcal*

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female roles. According to Paredes, this concept is based on vertical hierarchical complementarity, where women occupy lower and subordinate positions to men, who usurp the public sphere, while women are expelled to a private sphere and are a mere complement to men. The chacha-warimi concept is therefore "a scenario of strong sexist resistance, privileges for men and violence of all kinds towards women" (Paredes 2013, 82). Paredes also points out that a complementary couple is confused with a heterosexual couple at the political level. As a result, women's political representation has neither strength nor legitimacy: if a man is elected to a position of community authority, his wife automatically assumes the same role as a member of a complementary couple without being elected. Mandatory heterosexuality and the mixing of family and political roles thus weaken the political position of women in the community. The solution lies in replacing the heterosexual couple model with a truly complementary pair and in replacing vertical hierarchical complementarity with horizontal complementarity. This new form of complementarity, which Paredes symbolically refers to as *warimi-chacha*, implies the establishment of the *warimi-pacha*, the recapturing of women's time (Paredes 2013, 85).

Paredes and Guzmán's Aymara community feminism advocates decolonisation and depatriarchalisation through the community. In their view, the community is a symbolic *ch'ixi* space, to which the dynamic between the individual and the communal gives new qualities on a higher systemic level. The systemic interconnectedness of community means that any form of individual discrimination harms the community. From this point of view, individual rights and the rights of the community are not mutually exclusive, but on the contrary represent an indivisible whole. Community feminism thus challenges Western dualism and presents an alternative perspective based on the dialogue between indigenous and Western epistemologies. Within this perspective, the traditional and the millennial exist alongside the modern without any contradictions. Through this "parallel contemporaneity", "parallel experience of time" (Paredes Carvajal 2013) Aymara community feminists propose what Cusicanqui calls „other modernity“ (Cusicanqui 2015), an instrument of decolonization.

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Towards a radical alternative?

Contemporary Bolivian decolonial feminism is remarkable for several reasons. Firstly, it is rooted in the long historical tradition of the Bolivian workers' movement, which has been strongly influenced by the ideas of anarchism and which has always been very closely linked to and overlapped with the indigenous movement sharing the same anti-colonial and autonomist agenda. Bolivian anarchist tradition that has decisively influenced the formation of Bolivian decolonial feminism, has been widely studied by local scholars like Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, but has long been rather overlooked by the dominant Western academia.

Secondly, Bolivian decolonial feminism is based on local alternative theories that have been put into practice. The main promoters of decolonial feminism are intellectuals who have used their structurally grounded educations to create subversive anti-structural knowledge. Both Cusicanqui and Galindo left academia and preferred to build independent, autonomous spaces of alternative knowledge and practice (the Tambo Colectivo, Mujeres Creando). These autonomous spaces are the embodiment of Cusicanqui's concept of the *ch'ixi* world, a mottled society in which individual, seemingly exclusive identities do not enter conflict, but on the contrary create a dynamic space for dialogue and creative cooperation. In this sense, Galindo's *bastard feminism*, existentially based feminism, emphasises the creation of a social fabric among women who are forbidden to form alliances and who share the lived bodily experience of the underprivileged. According to Galindo, only through this collective social fabric women can really use and fulfill their potential, for as isolated individuals they are doomed to mere survival (Morales, Patricio and Roque 2016).

The emphasis on the individual's right to decide with regard to their body and sexuality based on Western tradition and the Aymara understanding of the individual as part of a wider community network, loses its contradiction within the logic of the *ch'ixi* world that is "neither a claim of autochtony nor a rejection of the foreign, and certainly not a fusion or blending of both, but rather a space of dialogue and creative tension between linguistic, cosmological and ethical perspectives on everyday life, work and protest from different repertoires of experience in a spirit of cooperation, affinity, individual freedom and mutual aid" (Laforcade 2020, 35).

The emancipatory and modernisation project of Bolivian decolonial feminism uses the logic of the *ch'ixi* world: it understands history as a cyclical process in which

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colonialism and the patriarchy is repeatedly regenerated. Decolonisation and depatriarchalisation are thus the key processes for liberation from all historical forms of oppression: gender, racial, ethnic, or environmental.

Thirdly, Bolivian decolonial feminists have constructed a subversive network of micro-spaces in which they create and live a real alternative to the current political and economic status quo. Both Cusicanqui's *Colectivx ch'ixi* and the *Mujeres Creando* are autonomous networks that create alternative knowledge and translate it into everyday practice. Bolivian decolonial feminism has created an ideological space from which alternative modernity has emerged as a means of self-definition and political emancipation. At a time of a desperate need for the radical transformation of economically, socially, and environmentally unsustainable patriarchal capitalism, it is underprivileged Bolivian women, equipped with their experience of overexploitation and oppression, who are providing one of the visions for a possible alternative.

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