
"COMMUNITARIAN FEMINISM IS AN ACTION-BASED WAY OF THINKING". INTERVIEW WITH JULIETA PAREDES

Julieta Paredes is a feminist, lesbian and Aymaran colleague. Within the sphere of Bolivian feminism she is beacon of clarity and rebellion, engaged in women's struggles in Bolivia and throughout the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean. She is the author of several publications, including Hilando Fino, co-author alongside María Galindo of: "Sexo, Placer y Sexualidad" and also co-author alongside Adriana Guzmán of the book "¿Qué es el feminismo comunitario? – Bases para la despatriarcalización".

Who is Julieta Paredes, where does she come from and what is her connection to the 'Mujeres Creando' community and to Communitarian Feminism at present?

My name is Julieta Paredes Carvajal and I am a member of the Aymara Indigenous community of Bolivia. Since a very young age I have dedicated my life to advocating with my people from a leftist stance and subsequently through the feminist movement.

I became a feminist after discovering the struggles of other women and also on the basis that sexuality should not be the heterosexual norm. I am lesbian. That emotional relationships and pleasures not only brighten life, but are also a political position theretoward. Popular Education served as the foundation for engagement with sectors in the neighbourhoods of La Paz and upon which I built my political standpoint.

The 'Mujeres Creando' community is the feminist collective that we founded in Bolivia to stand up against and condemn the model of neoliberalism that had been devastating lives in our territories since 1990.

The book Hilando Fino, which was released in 2009, allowed me to define another conceptual base to pursue from the perspective of our indigenous peoples and our countries. This conceptual framework I called Communitarian Feminism. It stems from four key areas and is not only based on today's events, but instead has emerged from 26 years of feminism in Bolivia. What are these key areas? Well: two historic social movements of the Bolivian peoples and two feminist organisations in Bolivia. They are the four areas.

¹ Interview conducted by Luis Andrés Sanabria Zaniboni.

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The social movements

One is the extensive backlog of struggles experienced by our ancestors against the forms of domination they were subjected to in the territories of Kollasuyo (today's Bolivia) and which now constitute our origins.

The other is the process of change, sparked by the Bolivian people on October 2003 and behind which we too are the forces and instruments. It is the process that gave birth to depatriarchalism, decolonisation and deneoliberalism, the latter being understood as an approach that subverts the foundations of capitalism and exploitation.

The organisations

The '*Mujeres Creando*' community with 26 years' experience striving for independent Bolivian feminism is the outcome of talks held in Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters and of the revival of the fight fought by our worldly, anarchic and revolutionary ancestors.

The second organisation is the *Feminist Assembly of La Paz* that was established after the mobilisation of women during the gas conflict of 2003. During our involvement in the constituent process, the Feminist Assembly became known as the Communitarian Feminist Assembly (AFC in Spanish), which is the organisation at the forefront of our endeavours to build a movement in Latin America and the Caribbean, the continent of Abya Yala.

What is communitarian feminism and how is it connected to living well?

Communitarian feminism is a social practice that defines and develops social proposals from the perspective of women, reconceptualising and creating concepts whilst decrying others.

Communitarian feminism is an action-based way of thinking that has materialised from a 26 year-long process in Bolivia. We interchangeably use feminism and communitarian feminism because we do not use feminism adjectively - community is the proposal and we too are the community. It is in turn a mechanism to salvage our concepts from the claws of academic colonialism, of the superficiality and opportunism of fads, for the purpose of fundamentally *rallying* for the formation of a movement based on political trust, on theoretical production and creation, and on the ethics of our actions. It could be said that we are not communitarian feminists because we live in a rural community; maybe we do, but this is not what defines us - we are defined by our proposal of community and our proposal of society as a Community of communities.

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Communitarian feminism is a complex interwoven movement underway in Bolivia, Mexico, Chile and Sweden. We are an organic movement that encourages thought and reflection.

There is a solid focus on action-based decolonisation: why do you think it is necessary to also decolonise feminism?

Decolonisation of feminism, calling us Feminists is also a semantic strategy.

We have always said, whether for better or for worse, that feminism and feminists have significance in the world that we call an embedded semantic field, obviously hegemonically embedded by the invasion from Europe; however, it is important at this stage of our fight to adopt an attitude in the world and make decisions regarding this situation. Of course we wonder if it would have been better if we had chosen another name for our struggle and in turn not play into eurocentrism...without a doubt! With that being said, we must point out that it is not a case of European feminists being the most accepted in Europe or the USA. There is considerably less acceptance of revolutionary feminists in Europe, which is also relevant.

Insofar as inventing another name to go hand in hand with feminism is concerned, it is crucial to find out if other women had the same contemplations. In doing so, we discover that Chicana feminists asked themselves the same questions as us and chose to be called "mujeristas" [womenists]; however, nowadays this name goes by unmentioned, as do the associated struggles, and with all due respect, do not move beyond being anecdotes. We will not settle for being a mere anecdote; this is why the time is ripe to question all known hegemonies and powers.

We were also compelled to reflect on whether or not we should be called feminists as a result of the relationship between the two concepts of indigenous cosmovision and philosophy. When we speak to our indigenous brothers they tell us that cosmovision is more than philosophy; however, this is not the case, we believe that dealing with *semantic relationships* is not a matter of volunteerism. We understand semantic relationships as those tied to hierarchical aspects of the meaning, sense or interpretation of signs, whether linguistic such as symbols, words or expressions, or formal representations.

No matter how good our intentions are or how much effort we make, on the basis of hegemonic ideologies, the interpretations are the other way around - aspects relating to Indians are cosmovision and the European way of thinking is philosophy and philosophers are not Indian. The same applies to art, which is practised under the scope of western culture; in turn, our work that is carried out in line with our aesthetic sensibilities is called artisan.

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This is the world that we live in. Following reflection, we decided to join their side and call ourselves feminists too and among peers question the Eurocentric meaning of this term, develop a space for all women around the world, and of course for our struggles and political process towards change. We as communitarian feminists opt for the strategy of challenging the meaning of the concept of Feminism and Feminist, then discuss which type of feminism we are referring to or which meaning we are giving to feminism.

Calling ourselves feminists is not replicating Europe and the USA, we challenge them on their own semantic field, we dispute the content, because: "In fact, imitating the critical spirit of the colonising power that –theoretically, at the very least– exports and prompts a depiction would but demonstrate on behalf of the receiving power the lack of its own critical spirit, given that it blindly comes to imitate it." (Amorós, C. 2004, p.69)². Communitarian Feminism does not imitate or merely criticise; it challenges and contests the semantic field of feminism because we understand that a thought is but alive and responsive to the current global challenges or else it dies or is re-evolved.

Calling ourselves feminists is leaving the door open to the possibility of building a global women's movement in defiance of the patriarchy and forming the Community of communities. It is the acknowledgement and possibility of coordinating endeavours with others.

What do you believe are the main challenges faced by Communitarian Feminism and living well with regard to the dominant and traditional education processes?

Education is focused on domesticating individuals. This not only applies to traditional and dominant education processes, but also to those known as popular. Domestication in the latter's case is linked to machismo and to racism, to believing that the people lack knowledge and that they must be enlightened. These concepts reinforce the patriarchy under which we as women are considered different, and not as equals, when popular educators believe women should fall in love with and marry men, or are conditioned to focus on family and heterosexuality, denying our bodies the rightful pleasure.

Schools and universities do not help build community or contribute to living well; they enhance intellectual professionalization far beyond the scope of specific problems of individuals and the communities. It promotes individualism, the dismantling of social classes and the denial of identity. Macho behaviour and perspectives are not questioned, but instead are recycled into the so-called new masculinities©

² Amorós, C. (2004): "Por una ilustración multicultural" in Quaderns de Filosofia i ciencia 34, DOCUMENTO PARA EL FORO CON MARIELLA SALA, Madrid Spain.