

# Chapter 7

## Gender and Ethnic Identities Against Neoliberalism in Bolivia: The National Confederation of Indigenous Peasant Women of Bolivia

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter will address the relevance of social movements as promoters of change in Latin America since the crisis of neoliberalism. The case of Bolivia will be studied specifically, since it is a country that has gone through one of the most remarkable political and social transformation processes in the region. Indigenous-peasant social movements along with Bolivian trade unions have opposed to the neoliberal policies applied in their country for more than four decades, to dictatorial governments, to the interference of external powers, and they have mainly claimed for their ethnic and class identity. In this context, the National Confederation of Indigenous Peasant Women of Bolivia - Bartolina Sisa (CNMCIQB-BS) was founded in 1980 within the Central Union of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB).*

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## INTRODUCTION

In Latin America, Bolivia represents a paradigmatic case of national reconstruction. The rise of the Movement to Socialism (hereinafter MAS, for its name in Spanish) to the national government formalized the recognition of the country's ethnic plurality in the constitutional reform of 2009. The government conducted by Evo Morales Ayma assumed in 2006 and modified the way in which the national community was understood. From that moment, the country changed its name to Plurinational State of Bolivia. But this change, which many analysts would consider unfinished or superfluous, is not only the merit of the political coalition of MAS, it is also the result of the struggle of Bolivian social movements in the last decades.

In Bolivia, as in all Latin America, social movements and experiences of collective action occupy an extremely important place. During the twentieth century we can observe mobilizations of varying intensity, around different claims: labor rights, women's rights, right to land ownership, urban living conditions, access to housing and human rights. Since the last decades of the twentieth century, we observe in the region the reemergence of the indigenous as a political issue (Bengoa, 2000). A series of changes in the international system generated a new structure of political opportunities that allowed the rise of claims for ethnic diversity to the international scene and, from there, the pressure on national states. For their part, the indigenous social movements showed novel repertoires of protest, with renewed leadership as a product of a complex combination of tradition and of (what was considered) modernity.

Also, during the twentieth century we observe in the Latin American states different forms of approaching ethnicity. From the policies of assimilation and acculturation of the 19th century, which caused the expulsion of communities from their territories under the intention of building new *modern* nations, it evolved into paternalistic policies designed by sectors of the bourgeoisie that held positions in the state administration, oriented towards indigenous communities. The focus was set on improving communication between communities and urban centers: from the construction of roads, to rural schools and linguistic standardization policies. Indigenist policies of the first half of the twentieth century were based on the idea that indigenous communities were mired in tradition and engaged in agricultural activity. They were understood as the traditional remnant of the nation. These ideas contributed to the academic confusion between indigenous and peasant, mixing political categories with diverse problems.

Later, the politics of miscegenation sought to exalt the *mestizo* as the central character for the construction of modern Latin American nations. The policies of miscegenation, which had a marked development in some countries of the region such as Bolivia and Mexico, highlighted the results of the cultural exchange with the

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