

Decolonisation and dismantling patriarchy¹ for 'living well'

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From the *jatun ayllu* of Amarete to public office: restoring dignity

From my life story, my career, the path I have taken as an indigenous woman, a woman from the Kallawaya Nation, I have learned to live together with Mother Earth and with other indigenous peoples. The Kallawaya Nation is made up of several ayllus and none of them is superior to any of the others. Drawing on this experience, we are seeking to re-establish ancestral forms of knowledge. Decolonisation means restoring our dignity as indigenous peoples, because colonialism wanted to make us believe that our knowledge is worthless and our peoples are inferior.

The path I have travelled, from the *jatun ayllu* of Amarete, where I am from, to public office, began with my work with community organisations. Knowing how to read and write meant that I could support my mother when she held office as an authority. When I was a girl I accompanied my mother and helped her to write the records of meetings and decisions. When I was a young woman I started to become actively involved in young people's and women's organisations. In the Municipality of Charazani, an opportunity opened up for me to work in the communities and help women to learn to read and write and become aware of their rights. Despite my young age, I was elected sub-prefect of Bautista Saavedra province, but because of my age I did not take office.

In 2006 I was elected as a representative for the Constituent Assembly. First of all I was appointed by the Kallawaya Nation to represent Bautista Saavedra province. Because the Special Law Convening the Constituent Assembly provided for women's participation, through parity and alternation on the lists, when the representatives for my constituency – which includes another two provinces, Omasuyus and Muñecas – were appointed, I ended up being elected as the only woman representative. After my appointment, there was resistance from the other provinces whose leaders have traditionally been men; there was patriarchal resistance that was all the harsher because I was a young woman. I was kidnapped and they tried to force me to sign my resignation. In exchange for letting me go, they made me sign a blank sheet of paper, so that they could falsify any document against my will. They also threatened me with retribution if I denounced them. But fortunately the community mobilised to rescue me. After that personal struggle, with the support of my community - and women

and young people from other communities - I entered the Constituent Assembly at the age of 22.

My main battle in the Constituent Assembly was to gain recognition of the Kallawayaya Nation as one of the 36 indigenous peoples that make up the Plurinational State, as well as the Kallawayaya-machajuya language and indigenous autonomy. I also fought for the decolonisation of justice and the valuing of the indigenous peoples' traditional medicine. The defence of women's rights in the Assembly was another hard battle. The point of all of this was the need to build a Plurinational State based on *Buen Vivir* (a term in Spanish that can be translated as "living well," but with a distinctive meaning in the Latin American and particularly indigenous context).

As a member of the Assembly's Social Development Committee, getting certain articles included in the text of the new constitution wasn't easy either, even though women from different parties and different social classes were in the majority in the committee. The women from the opposition parties were against having specific articles for indigenous women. They even proposed the right to life from the moment of conception, and wanted to criminalise the use of certain contraceptive methods because they might provoke an abortion. This idea of the right to life from the moment of conception was patriarchal. It was coming from women, but women with economic power, and that's why they were not in solidarity with indigenous women with low incomes, women from rural areas, who use certain medicinal plants to space our pregnancies.

In 2010 I was invited to join the Vice-Ministry of Decolonisation, together with other sisters and brothers from the Constituent Assembly. We set up the Office for Depatriarchalisation as part of the vice-ministry, and that's where I work today.

On my journey from my *ayllu* to public office, I learned that the Plurinational State must take into account Bolivia's 36 indigenous nations who have different concepts and experiences of *Buen Vivir*, in order to build a fair and harmonious society, free from discrimination and exploitation, from the bottom up.

***Buen Vivir* from the wisdom of the indigenous peoples**

Buen Vivir can only be built by taking the example of how our communities and *ayllus* live. The community is made up of all living beings – human beings, animals and Mother Earth. From when you are a child in the community, they teach you respect for all beings. For our grandparents, everything that surrounds

us has life, including water and the mountains. The rainbow has life because it forms out of the springs of water. Everything in nature is *chacha-warmi* and has its own equilibrium.

In the community we also learn forms of organisation such as *mink'a* and *ayni*. *Mink'a* is community work for everyone, and *ayni* is reciprocal work. We also barter the region's crops and livestock, and this enables us to diversify and produce the Kallawayá Nation's own economy. What's also important alongside this is the ancestral wisdom about the *pirwas* – the storage of food and cereals, which enables us to provide for times of drought or floods, as we have food that can last more than five years. We don't have the idea of consuming everything we produce in the *ayllu*, squandering what Mother Earth gives us. *Qapana*, which is crop rotation, enables us to look after the earth and maintain its production capacity. *Waki* is solidarity or the gift of produce you give to someone who's had unforeseen expenditure due to illness, for example, or for other reasons. We need to draw on all this wisdom as we build the concept of *Buen Vivir*.

Decolonisation and dismantling patriarchy

To build *Buen Vivir*, we need to get rid of relations of domination and exploitation by means of decolonisation and dismantling patriarchy. We say that colonialism rests on two axes: racism and patriarchy. That's why, in the Vice-Ministry, we are seeking to:

1. Reveal the social relations of domination that correspond to the patriarchal and colonial order, and make them visible.
2. Destabilise the structures of patriarchal and colonial domination, and throw them into crisis.
3. Transform these social relations of domination, to build a fair and harmonious society, in equilibrium with Mother Earth.

One of our policies in the Vice-Ministry of Decolonisation's Office of Depatriarchalisation was to set up the "Marriage rooted in community and ancestral values" Programme. This seeks to build an experience of recovering ancestral models of family composition, and re-establish and affirm indigenous and original peoples' knowledge systems. It should be pointed out that marriages based on patriarchy are currently in crisis. The state should take into account that, in order to transform society and build the Plurinational State, it must change the

dominant forms of organising the family, which are the fruit of colonialism and patriarchy.

We need to reinstate the exercise of authority by indigenous and original peoples and rural communities, and take it back to its ancestral roots, because the arrival of colonialism and the church usurped the ancestral form of marriage, linked to the ways authority is exercised in communities. Since colonial times, in order to hold office the couple must get married under the norms of the Catholic church, and the resulting marriage likewise conforms to the church's patriarchal norms. In the community, someone is considered a person when they form a married couple – *jake* (in Aymara) or *runa* (in Quechua). Only after marriage do they gain access to land and the couple is able to perform rituals to Mother Earth and be an authority. Positions of authority in indigenous communities are held jointly by the couple. That is why it is very important to re-establish marriage based on ancestral knowledge, restoring good wisdom and getting rid of bad practices.

It is necessary to mention that the Catholic church has played a central role in the patriarchal colonial domination of indigenous peoples and women in marriage, assigning them different roles. The man is given the role of provider and head of the family, while women are assigned the reproductive role. With these ideas, imposed by the church, you get beliefs such as that women who have 12 sons will go straight to heaven, without sin, because Jesus had 12 disciples, all men. That is just pure machismo.

This allocation of roles to women is a form of domination, so that indigenous people accept that they must be poor and uneducated, and women spend their whole lives looking after children with the idea of going to heaven.

In these times of change with the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the construction of new families, we maintain that if the family is made stronger in its relations based on parity and reciprocity, society and the Plurinational State will also be strengthened. At the moment, the patriarchal family is the cause of violence based on male domination and, as a result, family break-up. What we are proposing as an alternative is to build new family forms, as the basis for dismantling patriarchy. These new families are not just the nuclear family – they are plural in their composition.

Changing the law, or moving from liberalism based on colonialism to emancipatory plurinational laws, implies legal reform with a view to decolonisation and dismantling patriarchy, leading to the formation of the Plurinational State. That's why we're working to reform the Family Code, which will be changed to the

Families (plural) Code. We're also working on a law to change the civil registry and the Constitutional Equivalence Law, which will introduce parity in all systems of public office and also enable public policies to be drawn up for women and the new families. If there is parity in the composition of state institutions, it will reduce patriarchy in the state.

From the experience of the communities, where the whole community supports the newly-weds in their new life through *ayni*, we believe that the Plurinational State should be built from the bottom up, from the *ayllus* and families as the smallest spaces in day-to-day life.

The new Constitution of the Plurinational State opened the way for dismantling patriarchy to be included as part of the decolonisation process. It is the movements and ideologies of indigenous people who have managed to make it clear that the concepts of equivalence, complementarity and harmony between women, men and Mother Earth are not just discourses but the very *ajayu* (spirit) of the process of change.

Science and modernity are challenging *Pachamama*, looking for life on other planets. In the same way, they want to replace women with ideas such as implanting a uterus in men, which is something they're currently trying to do. Usurping and stealing women's wisdom or ancestral achievements, in the name of modernity and science and developmentalism, are the acts of patriarchs captivated by their own domination – it's capitalist patriarchal racism.

To re-establish *Buen Vivir*, we need equilibrium between women, men and Mother Earth, our *Pachamama*.