

Carolin Schurr

Performing Politics, Making Space

A Visual Ethnography of Political Change in Ecuador



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‘The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created’ (hooks 1994: 207).

Feminist scholars have long insisted that research is always a collaborative endeavor. It is my heartfelt wish to acknowledge the support, help, inspiration, and collaboration of those people who have significantly contributed to making this research project happen.

My interest in Latin American politics began at the start of the new millennium in London, where a Brazilian friend convinced me to backpack with her through Latin America. Travelling up the Brazilian coast, we discussed with the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* questions of land rights; on board of a ship along the Amazon, we had passionate conversations about the rights of indigenous people; in Bolivia, we became excited about the emerging power of the indigenous movement; in Argentina, we were confronted with the current economic crisis, when we ended up in the middle of riots in front of a bank. This long journey through a number of Latin American countries piqued my interest to learn more about this colorful continent full of contrasts. *Obrigada a Lou* for introducing me to this wonderful part of the world.

Hoping to better understand this ‘New World’, I started studying Geography and Latin American Studies in Eichstätt. A student exchange program of the DAAD offered me the possibility to study at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador in Quito. At the same time, I worked as an intern at the German Development Cooperation (GIZ). While I learned much about Luhmann’s System Theory, Beck’s Risikogesellschaft, and Marx’s Kapital in my classes, it was through the internship and my manifold travels to the province of Cotopaxi that I came to better understand the power relations that saturate Ecuadorian politics. I was lucky to have a very critical group of colleagues at the GIZ that not only introduced me to critical development studies, post-development, and postcolonial theory but also to the particularities of Andean life through sharing their everyday lives with me. *Miles de gracias a* Oscar Forrero for questioning my understanding of development, to Edison Mafla, María Belén Molina, Marjorie Reinoso, Sofia Starnfeld for the *fiestas* and *cervezas*, and especially to Lorena Cantillo for her love, her hospitality, and the many ‘*escapadas*’ that distracted me in wonderful ways from time to time from my ‘real’ work in Ecuador.

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cionais das campanhas eleitorais equatorianas. *Revista Latino-Americana de Geografia e Gênero*. *Revista Latino-Americana de Geografia e Gênero* 3 (2), 3–15. Unless stated otherwise, the copyright of the images, tables, maps and graphs lie with the author. I have made every attempt to contact the institutions and people who hold the copyrights of the images and graphs I have used. The institutional landscape in Ecuador is characterized by fast changes that make it difficult to identify copyright holders. The fact that I finish this book some thousands miles away from Ecuador makes this endeavor impossible. I hope the copyright holders agree with the way I have used their images.

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DEPARTURES

THREE VIGNETTES: ENCOUNTERING WOMEN IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

September 18th, 2005,
car ride on a stony road to Corazon Grande, Ecuador

Radio: In Germany, Angela Merkel has
just been elected the first woman Chancellor.

Lorena: Wow, you gonna be governed by a woman!
What is this going to be like?

Me: I don't know, I can't imagine it. I have been gov-
erned nearly all my life by this big man, Helmut Kohl.



March 3rd, 2008, national congress Ecuador
Interview National Asambleista Diana Ataimant:

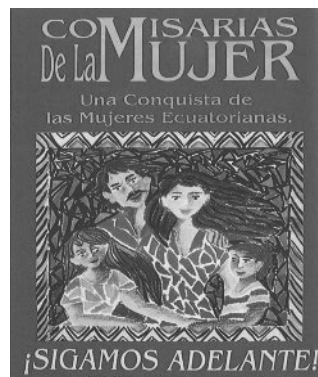
“This political space I am occupying is a space
from which women and especially Shuar women
have always been excluded.”

Figure 1: Diana Ataimant in the National Assembly

April 14th, 2009, Provincial Council of Orellana
Interview Prefect Guadalupe Llori:

“We didn't have a Comisaría de la Mujer [legal of-
fice where women can report sexual violence], so
we created the Comisaría de la Mujer. Back then I
was the Mayor and we build this shelter, because
this was a pueblo machista who violated the
women.”

Figure 2: Leaflet of the National Women's Office



1.

INTRODUCING POLITICAL CHANGE IN ECUADOR

The huge white body of Helmut Kohl epitomized and embodied politics throughout my childhood and adolescence. As the vignettes show, it was about the time when Angela Merkel became the first female Chancellor of Germany, when my interest in the co-constructive processes of gendered and ethnic identities and political spaces in the Ecuadorian context emerged. Working as a graduate student with local politicians in the highland province of Cotopaxi, I became fascinated with the transformations occurring at fast pace in Ecuadorian politics (Schurr 2009a). In 2004, when I first started to conduct research in Ecuador, the success of social movement struggles became more and more visible: Indigenous movements had successfully established indigenous people¹ as political subjects as a consequence of the overthrow of President Jamil Mahuad by indigenous mass protest (O'Connor 2003, Selverston-Scher 2001, Van Cott 2008, Yashar 2006b, Zamosc 2004). Within the indigenous movement, indigenous women like Diana Ataimant, cited above, increasingly gained space in electoral politics with Nina Pacari appointed to the post of foreign minister as the first indigenous woman in 2003 (Andolina, Laurie, and Radcliffe 2009, Pacari 2005, Prieto et al. 2006, Radcliffe 2002). In the elections of 2004, the women's movement managed to legally penalize all political parties whose electoral lists did not conform to conditions of the gender quota law, which required the parties to alternate men and women in equal numbers in the electoral lists (Quezada 2009, Vega Ugalde 2005). As a result, women presented over 40 percent of the candidates of the 2004 elections. At the beginning of the new millennium, women, indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian people became elected as mayors and prefects for the first time as a result of successful struggles of both ethnic and women's movements (Arboleda 1993, Lalander 2010, Radcliffe, Laurie, and Andolina 2002, Van Cott 2008). Taking into account that most female, indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian peasants and workers were denied their political citizenship rights until 1979, when literacy requirements for suffrage were eliminated, these are stunning developments. As

1 The term '*indígena*', introduced by the Spanish colonizers, reflects the power those have who name and define other people. Further, the term homogenizes the numerous indigenous ethnicities; alone in Ecuador, indigenous people identify with fourteen different *nacionalidades* y sixteen pueblos. 'Indigeness', however, has changed over time and has been reconnected positively by the indigenous movement (Radcliffe 1997).

women, indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian people first gained ground in the spaces of local politics such as rural parishes, municipalities, and provincial councils, I was eager to learn more about the way ethnic, gender and class differences were negotiated between traditional and new political subjects in local politics. The term 'new political subjects' is used here to refer exactly to these emerging political subjects – mainly women, indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian people – who have been excluded from formal citizenship since colonial times. While these social groups have a long history of political struggle in Ecuador (Prieto 2004, Prieto and Goetschel 2008), they have appeared in institutionalized politics only recently in more significant numbers. The term new political subjects results from their participation in 'new social movements' through which they have fought for their political rights (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998, Escobar and Alvarez 1992).

Processes of political transformation have been at the center of my personal and academic concern for a while, as the vignettes above show. What has really intrigued me, in the change of power to Angela Merkel, Diana Atainmant or Guadalupe Llori and all the other women I have encountered in my research, is the role identity and difference play in the construction of political spaces in post-colonial contexts. While I have still just a very partial answer to the question whether women make a difference in electoral politics (and vignette number 3 certainly shows that they do), I have been surprised by the diverse motivations, struggles, competencies, knowledges, thoughts, convictions and emotions of the women politicians I encountered during my research. I was struck by the differences I found among women politicians, but also the similarities of their daily struggles they face beside their diverse (political) biographies. These constant tensions between differences and commonalities that characterize women's experience in electoral politics, however, are barely acknowledged in the popular and academic writing about women in politics despite a fast growing body of literature dealing with women's participation in electoral politics. The media is more interested whether women are actually the better (read: less corrupt and more beautiful) politicians (Lüneborg 2009), international organizations are more concerned about the rise of women into electoral office to make progress towards the third Millennium Development Goal (BMZ 2007, Byanyima 2007), and academic literature still focuses primarily on gender as a category of difference that structures the spaces of politics, by and large not taking into account the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and locality (Craske 2003, Lovenduski 2005, 2010, Sauer 2008). Being sensitive to the intersectionality of social structures and identities that shape spaces of politics and having in mind their time-spatial situatedness, the aim of this study is to fill the blank spots at the intersections of gender, ethnicity, class and locality in the way participation in electoral politics is performed, experienced, felt, thought, depicted, and tackled.

The reasons that have driven the making of this research are essentially three: First, women have been increasingly successful in winning elections on all political levels in Latin America. Of the 33 countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region, nine have elected female presidents or prime ministers, an achievement unparalleled elsewhere in the developing world. Michele Bachelete (Chile

2006–2010), Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Argentina 2007–2011), and Dilma Rousseff (Brazil 2011–2015) are just the most prominent examples. While much has been written about women in national politics (e.g. Bush 2011, Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005, James 1997), little is known about the women who have entered local politics as a result of gender quota laws implemented throughout the region between 1997–2002 (Peschard 2003). At the same time, indigenous movement struggles have resulted in the institutionalization of indigenous politics in form of ethnic political movements and the election of indigenous politicians, most famously Evo Morales in Bolivia (Andolina 1999, Becker 2008b, Lucero 2008, Rice 2011, Rice and Van Cott 2006, Selverston-Scher 2001, Van Cott 2000, 2006, 2008, Yashar 1999, 2006a, 2006b). While the indigenous and women's movement have been investigated mostly on separate terms or by focusing explicitly on the political agency of indigenous women, I am interested in the intersections between the two movements. Hence, this research focuses on the interplay between gender and ethnicity in transformation processes in electoral local politics.

Second, to foster social change and enrich democracy, we need to know more about the way new political subjects like women, indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian people shape the constitution of both the discursive and material spaces of politics in post-colonial contexts². Focusing on the everyday practices of these so called new political subjects, I aim to question how the presence of new political subjects actually transforms political agendas, alters the constitution of political spatialities and renegotiates access to the spaces of politics. In so doing, I bring to the center of attention democratic processes in post-colonial societies that have been neglected by an electoral geography that has mostly focused on the core countries in the Western hemisphere (Flint and Taylor 2007: 195).

Third, by focusing on the way new political subjects constitute and transform the very spatialities of politics, I would like to go beyond existing research in electoral geography and political science about women's political representation that is satisfied with presenting the number of women in electoral politics and discussing the gendered effect of policies launched by women. As this work builds upon these studies, it is far from arguing that this knowledge is not useful, but rather wants to suggest that there is the necessity to move further, to delve into the messiness, contradictions and affective dimensions of local politicians' everyday lives. While much has been written on the structural, institutional and cultural bar-

2 Throughout my work, I differentiate between post-colonial and postcolonial. Sharp (2009a: 3–5) has pointed out the importance of the hyphen in differentiating between the post-colonial as the period following independence from colonial powers and postcolonial as a critical approach that challenges colonialism and the values and meanings it depended upon (for a problematisation of the term see further Appiah 1991, Hall 1996a, McClintock 1995).