

The *Supermadre* and the Governmentality of Heteronormativity in Post-Water Wars Bolivia

As one of the first countries to undergo the extreme structural adjustment measures instituted by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, Bolivia has unsurprisingly emerged as a global center of resistance to modern/colonial capitalism and as a site productive of alternatives to neoliberal economic agendas. In the case of Bolivia, many activists and scholars have seen the exciting potentiality for the creation of a post-capitalist economy, replete with a remade social order that does not rest upon liberal identity classifications. Nevertheless, the role of the nuclear family as a technology of neoliberal governance has remained undertheorized in relation to these socioeconomic alternatives. While the leftist government of Evo Morales claims to have “left behind the colonial, republican and neo-liberal State” in the 2008 Bolivian Constitution, categorizations of gender, sexuality and family continue to be unaddressed in Morales’ administration and are often seen as side issues to race and ethnicity in discussions of alternative, post-capitalist futures. In this paper, I look back to the Cochabamba water wars of 2000—the event that ushered in Bolivia’s period of resistance to economic globalization—and examine the figure of the *supermadre* as a political subjectivity that became inscribed within radical Bolivian politics at this time. Conceptualized as able to do battle with the foreign forces of neoliberal privatization while simultaneously fulfilling her role as a mother and caretaker by fighting to protect her children and her family’s access to resources, the *supermadre* both challenges and reinforces hegemonic gender norms while also dictating the boundaries of appropriate sexuality. The centrality of the *supermadre* in progressive Bolivian politics highlights the need for a feminist analysis of the subjectivities being produced by the sociopolitical changes in the country. Utilizing a queer theory framework, I will demonstrate that while politically effective, representations of the *supermadre* give validation to the heteronormative model of the neoliberal nuclear family, complete with its gender binary and strident regulation of sexuality, and ultimately argue that the absence of a gender critique in the current administration works to reinscribe the colonial/neoliberal governmentality that Bolivian activists have been working for decades to shake off.

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