

Political subjectivity in the youth of the city of El Alto¹

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ABSTRACT

Politics is reflected in the subjectivity of the *Alteño* youngsters; such subjectivity contains also their cultural identity. For these youngsters, reclaiming their culture equals to showing themselves as against poverty, race discrimination, and the unequal conditions in which they live.

Research on politics shows that, in most cases, the Bolivian society and that of El Alto in particular, are enmeshed in an authoritarian culture, apathetic to politics, or, otherwise, that they lack a political culture that could consolidate democratic institutionalization (see, among others: Michel Seligson, 2002; 2004; Bolivia Proyecto Salud Reproductiva Nacional, 2003; Yuri Torres *et al.*, 2003.). These studies have constructed an image of the relationship between politics and society in Bolivia that has marked what is done in academic circles as in the institutional sphere. However, is this the best way of thinking politics?

This article³ affirms that for understanding the political problematic from a city like El Alto, one should not forget the fact that this city is not the home of a modern western society, and that, taking its history into account, it cannot be thought under such parameters. Any empirical research should start from this fact. But, the vision of politics tied only one conception – especially during the democratic period – has tried to reduce research to only one focus, supposing that this is the “model” of democracy, tolerance, political culture, etc. That is why these studies on politics are not restricted to mentioning only facts (which are also an assumption of their focus), but they also prescribe possible alternatives facing the problems of the current democratic institutionalization.

A substantial number of researchers and political analysts agree that the political system lacks consolidation, and that the process of institutionalization depends on political culture. If one limits oneself to this way of reasoning one realizes that, in fact, it is the model of politics, tolerance and political culture that these analysts suppose, which defines the lack of any factor for the consolidation of democratic institutionalization. That is to say, that it is the factual reality before us

¹ Article published in number 21 of *T'inkazos*, December 2006.

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³ This article synthesizes the main conclusions of the of the research study “La política de los ‘otros’: la subjetividad política de la juventud en la ciudad de El Alto” [The politics of the ‘others’: Political subjectivity of the El Alto youth], coordinated by Jiovanny Samanamud, with the participation of Cleverth Cárdenas and Patrisia Prieto. The study was done in 7 months (December 2005 to June 2006), funded by the Program of Strategic Investigation in Bolivia (PIEB) under the call for research proposals: El Alto: For a dignified life.

which is mistaken, while the model of democratic institutionality is fine; the objective is to attain such ideal of democracy and institutionality. This assumption is shared by researchers and analysts when they try to understand politics in Bolivia.

Behind this reasoning a “prejudice” is hidden: that in Bolivia there is only one model of democratic institutionality and that it is the “only” alternative. If the Bolivian society is in the process of institutional consolidation, this reasoning presupposes there is only one direction, modern democracy, in which all social processes “must” proceed. If we consider that society constitutes itself or is in the process of constituting itself, for being more objective, we should grab all the possible senses, and not just the “only” possible sense, which, in final analysis, is a normative criterion, over which empirical data are organized. Thus the norms of this intention leave aside the objectivity of analysis, assume modern democratic institutionality as an unquestionable truth, and they are implicitly put behind whatever other way of thinking on politics. Paradoxically, they are not generated by scientific reasoning, but rather are arguments coming from the model of modern democratic institutionality, which was never challenged.

Any distinction or conceptualization of politics, presupposes an implicit normative load. The mere definition of politics contains its historical load and is compromised with an historical horizon. It is not by chance that the issue of political culture been much worked on, from political perceptions in the manner of cognitive competences, which presupposes a formal perspective of politics, stating the importance and primacy of the political system and its institutionality.

The definitions of politics tied to institutionality do not take into account that they construct knowledge under the historical horizon of the specifically modern reality, because it was from such reality that emerged the conceptual formalization of modern institutionality, democratic culture, tolerance, and nationality. Thus, it is not strange that for many researchers the Bolivians or *Alteños* appear as intolerant, hardly committed to democratic institutionalism, lacking political culture, authoritarian, or apathetic towards politics.

Our research on the political subjectivity of the youth in El Alto⁴ showed the change which is happening for these actors, and which expresses the conformation of a different horizon, from which to start for conceiving politics and institutionality. In this research we challenge, through empirical work, the definition of political reality. It is not only of the given, it is defined not only as what exists, but also of what it is being given, that is to say, the new senses that are being generated.

Well, in the order of the given it is clear that these political potentialities, constituted in a subjectivity in the making do not set out toward one sense only, they are expressed, for instance, in the importance of politics for the youth. Youngsters do not want to participate actively in a political field already institutionally defined, even though they do think of the political on the basis of a resignifying of cultural identity. Discrimination, exclusion, and the resignifying of cultural identity are the cornerstones that make it possible to project different political senses as potential against the reality of politics. Political senses do not differentiate themselves from egalitarian and democratic claims contained in the modern discourse of politics; however, some of them manage to become different as opposed to the current political system; meaning, that they make up an “exteriority” in the sense of Dussel, before institutionalized politics.

⁴ The research, in its **quantitative** side rested in the implementation of a representative survey in 8 of the 9 districts of El Alto city among youngsters between 18 and 25 years of age; in its **qualitative** side, the research was based in the compiling of testimonies about the political experiences of juvenile groups that were identified and chosen thanks to a census of juvenile groupings.

The “exteriority” of this kind of political subjectivity does not turn into an automatic realization, expressed in a “political antagonism”, in the sense of Laclau, tending to construct another hegemonic form of things political, but which is in a latent sense in the interpellating practices rather than in rationally structured discourses. This political subjectivity, whose substrate is not specifically modern, is also a different way of referring to things political, that is not expressed specifically in modern formal reason for cognitive competences. This process of constitution which is the movement of the given of politics within the subjectivity of youngsters, until the constitution of specifically political senses structured around diverse practices is what we call the *continuum* of political subjectivity in the youngsters.

Experience with politics

For understanding the political subjectivity of the El Alto youngsters it is necessary to know the perceptions of the youngsters towards what is termed politics in the usual and conventional sense. This implies a dealing with the object called politics, knowing how to relate daily with it, and showing how are political issues lived. Thus appears the first moment of subjectivity, when we understand how politics appears before the youth.

Politics, seen in this close up, implies a series of cognitive competences that have a concrete specificity within a “determined social field.”⁵ In other words, if every day one assumes formal values of politics, it is apparent that these values appear as cognitive competences about politics, for example regarding its definition. What is politics? Which are the values of politics? What is tolerance? What is dialog? Such knowledge creates the formal and conventional horizon on politics that, in the case of subjectivity of youngsters appears in a moment previous to its formalization as a cognitive competence.

In this part of the analysis it is important to take into account a fact. When we asked in the survey, What does politics mean for a youngster?, those consulted assigned a specific weight to “governing” and to “electing representatives”, assuming that representation and delegation are components of politics, coinciding fully with the rules of the political game established under representative democracy. This is to say that their understanding of politics is close to the conventional definition as a delegation of power. But knowledge about formal politics in the functioning of the political field is complimented with a valuation of politics; it is here that the standard and generalized of politics reveals new senses. “Responsibility” and “liberty” are the most important values of politics for the youth. Liberty does not necessarily accord with representation and responsibility. Although liberty is a necessary value taken into account by politics, this does not mean an exclusive relationship with representation. Here values leave the “institutionalized” framework⁶ of politics and open up more to senses from experience to aspirations.

Perhaps this kind of polarity between the idea of politics as part of representative democracy and the values that go beyond it, is expressed by the ambiguity shown by the youngsters when talking of the feeling generated by politics: at one end, “disgust,” while at the other end, “interest”. Most

⁵ In a concrete sense we should assume that the composition of a modern society (which is discussed issue in the case of Bolivia and specifically in El Alto) is completely differentiated; this implies that the cultural as well as the religious and political fields have their own rules of functioning, or rather that there are implicit and explicit rules acknowledged in every field, and that all subjects know them more or less fully. However, in the case of a non-modern society, as that of El Alto city, the situation is different. Experience with politics are the most original way of establishing an articulation with the modern political field whose pre-established rules come from another reality, which is not to say that the idea of politics be exclusively local. Thus, we use the idea of “social field” in a sense wider than that defined within a modern society.

⁶ Institutionality is part of the rules established or predefined by the current political field that talks of representative and participative democracy. However, liberty as a value and responsibility are not elements defined within the institutional or normative framework, but rather they go beyond there.

youngsters who feel “disgust” toward politics consider “responsibility” as the most important value; while those “interested” in politics consider that the most important value in politics is “liberty”. Duality is also expressed regarding the passive attitude and the active attitude toward politics. While the passive attitude considers politics as part of the act of electing or being elected, others youngsters consider politics as an active attitude as it provides a position and some kind of power is exercised.

Another issue for analysis refers to the importance of politics for youngsters in El Alto. Despite the negative feeling toward it, we see that politics is not put aside by the youngsters, but contrariwise, is recurrent among family and friends. Although only “once in a while” politics as it is experienced, there is not the apathy one might expect after the loss of credibility in the political system.

The emphasis on the importance of politics are given by the El Alto youths themselves, for whom talking about political issues with their friends is “important”. So we can state the existence of a “deliberative community,” that is, that talking about politics implies the argumentative constitution through discourse or dialog, and is the expression of the conformation of an intersubjectivity tied to language, which carries explicit cultural contents. Through the use of language, which is intersubjective, subjectivity is constituted. This is why such experience, expressed on the daily level, is a manifestation of the importance of politics, not thought from a modern institutional level because, in a strict sense, it is not addressed to it.

Facing these data, and as an outcome of the research, a new finding comes. The youngsters do not participate actively in political parties nor in social movements. Most youngsters consulted do not identify themselves “at all” with political parties. Also, we found that the youngsters do not identify themselves fully with social movements. Does this mean that there is no “serious” commitment to politics? Or else, should we examine how politics is understood and expressed by the youngsters. In other words, at which level are they interested in politics, and how do they wish to participate in politics, taking into account that the conditions for them to participate in politics are not completely lacking. There are many organizations, including a youth organization linked to the Federación de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto [FEJUVE, Federation Neighborhood Associations of El Alto], which actively takes part in political affairs, for example, during the so-called “Gas War”, when it preoccupied that youth claims were included among FEJUVE’s claims.

The constituting event of the youngsters’ political subjectivity

A first attempt for answering to the previous questions is to know in what moment interest in politics became apparent in the El Alto youngsters, even though they considered it as discriminatory, domineering and corrupt. In principle, one could think that those youngsters participated in political training courses or juvenile organizations, where they learnt in such topics. But that was not so. Most of those who answered to our survey, have never taken part in such activities, despite various NGOs and even the Roman Catholic Church in El Alto implemented training and leadership courses.

As an outcome the research, we can affirm the interest of youngsters in politics is not expressed by belonging to formal groups, but in their daily activities at college or the university. The subjectivity of the youngsters contains something that causes them to approach politics, and this something is an immediate experience, a main, recurrent topic, which generated the need of “being aware” of politics: the events of October 2003. So, when we ask them about the most important event for El Alto, most of them replied that it is the “Gas War.”

The constituting moment of subjectivity is expressed by the youngsters from the images identifying October 2003: “Death / Blood / Tragedy” or “Massacre / Violence / Repression.” Certainly, the October images could have been generated by the communication mass media, but even so, one

should not forget that constitution of subjectivity does not invalidate its being generated from a seeming “fiction” or “manipulation.” Supposing that the image is a media effect, the problem is how a fact becomes subjective and not if a fact is the product of an ideology, or rather, a “false consciousness” for the youngsters. In Žižek’s sense (2003: 37), the real character of an event is not denied by “false consciousness of ideology;” moreover, this is proof of its existence. If there is an image or representation generated by the communication media, radio or television, this does not deny the existence of the real process of its constitution.

Now, it is true that the real character of an event is what transcends to the youngsters’ subjectivity, even though it turns into different ways of naming it. In other words, there is a politization of the youngsters who found a reference point in what happened in October 2003. Social mobilizations, especially those occurred in October 2003, made it possible the politization of culture, which, in its turn, was incorporated or symbolized in the subjectivity of youngsters. Consequently, conditions were created for constituting discursively subjects ready for protesting, who use for that end the one thing they keep with them: their identity.⁷

Identity as the grouping of politics

Groupings (Zemelman, 1997) account for the articulation of things political with other levels, in this case, social levels, which are part of the constitution of subjectivity. Groupings give evidence of the opening of the individual stage to the group stage; and it is from this on that subjects can establish their different potentialities as social subjects. In the order of social groupings linked to politics in El Alto, one finds neighborhood activities along with neighborhood associations; which are home to the first approaches to political initiatives related to the immediate milieu.

In principle, youngsters express their “gratefulness”, though moderate, to their neighborhood’s association and agree to attend the marches summed by that institution, but only if the cause is right. This is not an isolated gratefulness, but rather it has to do with the importance of the youngsters’ opinions in the decision taking of the neighborhood association. The youngsters consider they have some influence and that their claims and petitions are heard and taken into account by their neighborhood’s organizations.

Identity is also part of this grouping occurring in politics. In the research, identity and cultural identification were differentiated. With respect to identity the youngsters answered that they are “Aymara”, while to the question on identification the majority answered: “Bolivian”. So what’s the difference between identity and identification? To begin with, identity is closest to what they believe they cannot elude, something with which they were born, whilst identification is something with which one identifies oneself, and that in a certain sense it is much more flexible. It is difficult to avoid identity because it is an issue that goes beyond mere self-identification. The youngsters acknowledge that their parents or grandparents arrived in the city from the countryside carrying a culture different from that of the city. So, their cultural identity is considered part of their self. For this reason, perhaps, culture has been converted into an important political reference point for youth. If it is certain that identification derives from a consciousness of beyond the national,

⁷ While we conducted the surveys, we asked a young man which religion he professed, and he said (ironically but with great sense) either that he was atheistic, that in El Alto they were so poor that they did not know even God. The only center of the youngsters, their source of values, are their own selves; and those selves contain a culture and values not yet touched by modernity. Facing exclusion and discrimination, it seems they only have themselves. The El Alto youngsters have lost almost everything, even God! This is why reclaiming their culture has a very political sense. This is the highest expression of the “will for living” which does not translate into a material ontological expression; instead, it implies the concrete life of a human subject and his ways of living; that is to say, his culture claimed against exclusion. This is another way of politics, that goes beyond modern politics, beyond the will for power.

cultural identity is an expression of a legacy for which it is not surprising that some youth groups express their sense of identity in an exaggerated manner.

For example, the organization Red Tinku tries to retake the roots of identity that, according to its members, the youths of El Alto have forgotten. Based on this problematic, and using the Andean duality, they have recovered for their organization, the leadership as “chacha warmi”. When taking decisions about their group’s activities, leadership is always assumed by a man *and* a woman, both with the same decision power and of summons (at least this is the ideal toward they want to get close to).

The posts in Red Tinku are “rotative,” copying the organizational forms in rural communities: all men and women must at some time form the head of the organization. Even though these youngsters do not consider this as a specifically political activity, this is a clear example of how the construction of the *we* through the resignifying of cultural identity implies changes in the institutionality of juvenile groups that, in practice, opposes the modern institutional way of organizing positions and hierarchies, based in what they consider their own cultural values. In other words, it is not a mere invention or “ideology,” even when the resignifying of culture is far from what is more real in appearance. One should not forget that ideology is an expression of something real that is being generated, expressed in concrete institutional forms, like the rotation of posts and the notion of duality in leadership. These political institutional forms are not part of the way of conventional organization, they are not recognized by modern institutionality, but this does not deny their political character. So for the subjectivity of the youth, culture is not folklore; it is also political, and little by little becomes a reference point as opposed to the “model” of modern organization.

The specificity of politics for the El Alto youngsters

We began stating that the political subjectivity of the El Alto youngsters should be thought of as a *continuum* (non linear), in the sense that it should display their “options of social construction.”⁸ Although there have been identified, through statistical data, certain regularities in the youngsters’ perceptions, specifically, only in some cases, those regularities have resulted in concrete a vision of the world starting from an organization and artistic or cultural statement that expresses an explicit political sense.

It is true that specifically political activities are still a minority expression, but they remain being the explicitation of the sense contained in this substantial political turn that the youth have shown, not only in their interest for participating, but also in what they express as horizons of life. Musical expressions, juvenile organizations and the different activities of the youngsters show this strong sense of the things political, consolidating in the way of a sense of self-consciousness, not so much of a specifically juvenile project, but rather as the potential for another kind of society, organized along different lines, whose central axis is identity and culture. This self-consciousness relates of the kind of society in which they want to live and, thus, it is the clearest expression of a politics and a way of exercising life politically which is not understood under the framework of the current political system, but that instead, interpellates it and society as a whole.

The youngsters of El Alto have subjectivized in a particular way discrimination and poverty, and the case of rap singers and hip-hop artists⁹ is the clearest example of how this expression confronts

⁸ In the research process, we should understand as options for social construction, not only the given but also what is being given, beginning from a different or distinct definition of reality that does not exhaust itself on the given. Thus, the historical horizon makes it possible the existence of possible projects or possibilities of senses, of which individuals can gradually take as their own. In this context we find potentialities expressed in a “plurality of life projects”. See Hugo Zemelman (1977).

⁹ Hip-hoppers: Singers of hip hop rhythms – so they define themselves.

discrimination by dressing up differently with wide pants, caps, using tattoos etc., but that little by little acquires a clear political sense of denounce, not only of the condition of exclusion, but also of the social problems that the youngsters identified within their songs' lyrics. Regarding politics, as most youths, hip-hoppers identified it as a bad word, like the institutionalizing of corruption, something that lead them to question also the party system, civil rights and obligations, which in their practical experience only serve as rhetoric and discourse, not having a base on reality.

A first explicit political sense is expressed in the construction of a collective *we*, starting from discrimination, which functions from racial discrimination and is stressed in the songs' lyrics, more than in daily discursive expressions. For them, Bolivia has been ransacked. Although many of their lyrics condemn corruption, behind them there is the construction of the nation, the integration of Bolivia as a whole. One of the lyrics states the following:

Bolivia, a mistreated indigenous land, badly paid,
Shitty fucking politicians don't know how to govern,
Don't know how to work,
But they're looking for money to steal
That's why I came here like Evo did,
Protesting with my rhymes,
I'm searching, bloody government,
Never acknowledged here, Political thieves,
With no compassion. ... 10

In these hip-hoppers one finds an almost generalized sense of unity regarding the country; although coexisting with a repulsion of those governing the State, against those who "misappropriated public funds and enriched themselves at the cost of the underprivileged poor," sentiments that drive them to write lyrics loaded with slogans. They say this is completely intentional and that their protest is linked to Bolivian reality.

Other kind of groups go beyond the expression of rebellion subjectivity are those having a much more explicit political expression as their way of organizing, such as the Federación de Estudiantes de Secundaria de El Alto [Federation of High School Students], the Red Tinku and the Comunidad Sur [Southern Community]. Such groups indicate that it is important to raise claiming attitudes, from culture to political action. This kind of groups has a more politicized and institutionalized perspective.

For these groups it is fundamental to start from their cultural roots; in fact they state that it is precisely this which constitutes them and gives them a sense of unity, along with other groups. An important issue is their organizational experiences being developed around a tradition; of course they are reconstructing an idea of the Andean way, which is interpreted, transformed and appropriated as the fact of organizing *lojtas* [. . .] as if they were *prestes* [communal festivities organized around reciprocity], in order to feel themselves as part of the community. These cases show an Andean community recreated by and for the youngsters. There is a clear expression and explicit political tendency, combined with a cultural claim. But the vision is pluralistic, although not in the liberal way, because, in principle, their pluralism does not emerge from an abstract postulate, rather it comes from a consideration of their own experience, concretely, it is their life that allows them to conceive a certain pluralism.

Let's read a testimony:

¹⁰ Lyrics of an unpublished composition of young girls who make Hip-hop music, sung during a get-together of young people of different hip-hop groups in Radio Wayna Tambo, 20 May, 2006.

In the FES as yet there is no ideology, it is being rebuilt, there is a **plurality of ideologies**: some of us support Indianism, others adhere to Marxism or Trotskyism ... we **students are pluralistic** because some of our fathers are in business, others are proletarians. Our **fathers make us see reality from different realities**. For this reason there is no ideology; we are still rebuilding it, **we just identify ourselves with the people**.¹¹

Here we do not find an abstract liberal pluralism starting from the isolated individual for claiming his freedom against other individuals; instead, here plurality is expressed in the difference between ways of life, without leaving aside social differences. There is quite a mature sense of a “critical pluralism.” We can also find a sense of “we” coming from their experience of poverty, but acknowledging the diversity of experiences between a poor people, a peasant, a merchant woman or a mine worker, leading to a definition of “people”.

We could say that the youngsters know that they are part of a much bigger movement; they define themselves as “unsatisfied in their needs due to oppression and exclusion” (Dussel, 2006; 97). There is a sense of solidarity between those who are outside the privileged spheres; from where they construct a bloc to which they can affiliate. There is a conception, doubtless very elaborated, of politics not as the expression of a modern formalism; rather, a conception coming from outside the political system. The youngsters go further and define different ways to reach agreements, but also turning upside-down the logic of the relationship between governors and governed:

... I believe that culturally the FES recovers the way how they organize themselves there in native Aymara communities: you are chosen as leader, and **leading is not directly serving themselves but instead serving the people**.¹²

The differences between the way of reasoning on politics from a formal vision and that of the youngsters are very clear. From a formal vision one assumes that representation gives one the benefit of being able to “govern” with full sovereignty and it is not understood that being in charge of an institution implies assuming a delegated power (*potestas* in the sense of Dussel, 2006) that is never lost. While in the logic of the youngsters, delegated power should “serve the people.” This inversion is achieved because the youths were able to make theirs the way of delegating power of Andean communities, or at least they resignified in such a way that power and the relationship between representative and those represented is defined differently. This is the clearest expression of non-modern political subjectivity.

In contrast to this youth groups organized either formally or informally under the clear purpose of disconformity with the political system, there are other groups that, contrarily, express postures that are, if not the reverse, much less discontented ones. Usually, they are grouped through the initiative and under the sponsorship of Roman Catholic priests.

Thus, it is not strange that the majority of religious youth groups in El Alto are Catholic. With this statement, I refer to groups that develop activities going beyond catechism or indoctrination. Some of these groups have leadership and management by youngsters who claim their “own independence” from adult influence and are semi-autonomous groups. These groups, also, focus their interest on the problem of identity as a conflict to be solved through national identity, which is to say, accepting all kinds of differences within themselves, but their “love” for their country has a

¹¹ Interview with José Luís Rodrigues, treasurer of the Federation of High School Students of El Alto (FES). May 2006.

¹² Interview with José Luís Rodrigues, treasurer of the Federation of High School Students of El Alto (FES). May 2006.

greater weight, even if their ways of interpellating tend to attaining the creation of a harmony linked to a class structure.

The religious juvenile groups of El Alto articulate their activities around their “struggle” to tell the youth about their rights. Along his way, they assume the motto of the Fundación Cuerpo de Cristo [Body of Christ Foundation]: “poverty is not discussed, it is fought,” and they are convinced that poverty can be fought trying to include the youths within the current political system and its institutionality, of which they are excluded. These groups try to build a project of civic-political formation, an activity restricted to the State. The main point of their activities is integrating youths to the State, in terms of an ethical or moral formation. Within the groups different positions exist: some agree with the social mobilizations, while others see them as an attempt for not letting the government govern; however, most of them tend toward morally supporting the mobilizations, because they all agree that El Alto is in a bad economic condition. The solution for them is to awaken consciousness of citizen rights.

In a certain sense, the positions of the El Alto religious groups are tied to more functional projects that help to integrate more the youth to their community instead of questioning it. This kind of groups acknowledge that there is corruption in El Alto and that it is an expression of crisis in the political system, but they consider it as a human weakness, rather than as a structural feature crossing through the whole society. The fundamental point of these juvenile activities is that they have a political background which displays a diversity of options in political positioning and which derives directly, in principle, from the conditions of discrimination and exclusion lived and from the resignifying of culture, even though these positions are closer to the modern political system than the previously mentioned.

However, despite social discrimination, the exclusion and appropriation of culture make up the horizons of sense of daily practice, they remain ambivalent or, as Laclau states, they represent “floating signifiers” (Laclau, 2004), as they may assume different senses according to the hegemonic project they refer to. For example, the Catholic and / or religious juvenile groups express a search for preserving the status quo, and are in favor of peace and social stability; they also acknowledge social exclusion, discrimination and the importance of culture, but assume themselves as being within the current political order, as they do not express a different way of political articulation.

In an intermediate position are the rap artists, the most important group of this trend. In their lyrics they show discontent against injustice, but do not leave aside the established order. They extrapolate their condition as marginalized from society and do not stay with a merely existential pronouncement as a group, but dare to interpellate a much wider context. Lastly, there are the groups that have achieved a more direct political action, through structural activity. These groups have generated a different vision of what their society represents, assuming the identity and culture in a radical sense, and denying even the legitimacy of the current social order, however from a cultural and identity-oriented reading of reality.

Conclusions

The political subjectivity of the El Alto youngsters is the performance of the social sphere incorporated into the biographic personal trajectory of the youngsters. In this sense, in order that subjectivity could be constituted, one should presuppose an “intersubjectivity,” which is to say, the field of language and the social and cultural relationships in which they function.

Intersubjectivity, in the case of the youngsters, is wide because it rests on social groupings (the neighborhood, cultural identity, for example). This makes up the intersubjective horizon or, in the word of Apel (1985: 209-249), the “community of communication”, a core part of any constitution

of subjectivity. The “community of communication” presupposes subjects constituted by language, a “community of speakers” using language games not only to relate to one another, but also to constitute themselves, individualize as subjects as self-knowledge (subjectivity) and a knowledge of the world (Apel, 1985: 211), this being intersubjectivity.

Under this horizon, politics is important for the youngsters, despite its subjectivity being tied to a conventional definition. When searching the constituting moment of the importance of politics or noting the political sense that culture and identity have for the youngsters, possible senses emerge and reality shows itself in various dimensions. Politics for youngsters emerges from the formal plane along with institutionality and at the same time it is politically resignified; thus other political senses are visualized which were latent, denied by modern institutionalization.

In the sense of “living together” of politics, El Alto juvenile organizations, whether hip-hop groups, Christian or groups with explicit political tendencies, we have identified ways of managing the common good. Which is to say, we are thinking in the must-be, present in projections or utopias, regarding how the common good should be managed at all levels, even though this is, for the time being, found only at the organizational and group level of youngsters and does not go beyond a rationalized discourse with explicit political sense.

The different ways of thinking politics are a reply to the failure of formal democratic politics. The model of institutional construction does not separate from the modern conception of politics, but rather from its own cultural sources; as these that are the basis that becomes a different point of departure as opposed to the formal democratic model. Thus, all this series of social constructions are not only political expressions, but also concrete ways of doing politics. Politics is expressed in the subjectivity of the El Alto youngsters; even though it crosses with formal modern postures, it lets one catch a glimpse that they see that they keep an unassimilated plus for the modern formality of politics. This reality could be the root of other reference points for constructing an institutionality with “other” characteristics.

In the research we had tried to distinguish the multiple possibilities of sense to be found in political reality, expressed by social subjects. But specifically our interest was in problematizing the notion of politics, as long as it supposes the inscription of our horizon of thought in a framework transcending that of modernity. As we pointed out at the beginning, our problem was not to understand politics from a modern formal framework, but to see which were the senses the youth gave politics, and revise which framework it presupposed, describing and analyzing the political subjectivity of the El Alto youth, in order to see how those youngster perceive, understand and project the political sphere.

The political subjectivity according to our reflection is equivalent not only to participating in the current political system, but also in the management of the common good; an aspect linked to being able to live well, linked to the youngsters’ interest in politics. This different vision of the institutionality of political leadership is expressed in the different juvenile organizational forms, even though it is apparent that a self-conscious political subjectivity is not yet generalized in the youth of El Alto. Nevertheless, the resignifying of culture as well as discrimination and exclusion are topics crossing the subjectivity of most of the El Alto youngsters. From our perspective, managing life in the plane of activities with groups of peers, with neighborhood organizations, and juvenile organizations also implies a political dimension which could or not relate to the established from the formal Bolivian democratic system.

Laclau and Dussel say that the people is the constitutive element of politics, because from there emerges the different possible senses and not only from the institutional framework. This is where those “political ideas” emerge without a significance “inhabited by a structural impossibility” (Laclau, 1990). For this, “floating signifiers” such as cultural identity open up a horizon of

feasibility not merely ideal, but articulated to its material dimension of implementation, thus articulated to the empirical impossibility of their implementation.

These “political senses” do not emerge for no reason at all nor do they not come from pure imagination, but they are strictly tied to the finiteness of the subject. Against exclusion, marginalization, the possibility of self-consciousness is expressed by the cultural resignifying as the spearhead of a sense opposed to formal modern politics. From their finiteness apparent in their existences, some youngsters may project a different institutional horizon. In this way, content is assigned to the floating signifier of culture, which beginning from its social grouping proposes itself ends. So, a dimension is opened up which was already contained in the subjectivity of the El Alto youngsters, although only few of them are able to materialize into concrete practices.

The process of constitution of political subjectivity of the El Alto youth shows a high degree of politicization of this social subject, but rather than becoming a specific kind of historical actor, it is a social subject who contributes to the resignifying of politics. Even though the self-consciousness of this fact is not expressed in the dimension of the given, the youngster find many ways of expressing themselves in society, many of them completely “external” to the modern formal way of making politics. Thus, one must observe the social practices generated in different levels of the social groupings (from mere interest in politics to the formation of groups that articulate politics with cultural identity), end up in this political subjectivity which, as a process, is constantly constituting and reconstituting itself.

In the subjectivity of the youngsters, cultural identity and political signifying are being linked together. This affirmation does not wish to suggest that culture does not have a political dimension, but that is one thing and another is that the subjects incorporate this fact and make it apparent explicitly in their subjectivity. But, how to explain that culture become politics, or why they mix with each other in this way? From our point of view, we believe that in a strict sense this is the expression of the “will to live” of a subject that lives crushed, of whom Hinkelammert told us.

In other words, to claim my culture is an expression of myself before my life conditions, it is pronouncing myself not only regarding racial discrimination but also the conditions of inequality. It is to face up the alternative of life proposed by the modern political horizon, assuming it is possible to find other ways of expression that become political in a context of inequality, but more than that it manifests as alternatives or even as “utopias” emerging from the experience of exclusion and discrimination. In this sense, the promises expressed by cultural values are much more credible than those of modern politics; here is when an “impossible” is constituted: “the native culture,” which little by little becomes the pole star that guides the practices of these youngsters.

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Translated by Robert Finestone Berkson

Translation from *Tinkazos* [on line]. Dec. 2006, n °. 21. ISSN 1990-7451.