

26. Interview with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas

Interview conducted by Silvia Federici with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas of Mujeres Creando. [The Interview took place on February 22, 2011, in Virgen de los Deseos, the Center of Mujeres Creando, in La Paz (Bolivia).]

Rosario Adrián is the person in charge of the daycare center that Mujeres Creando has set up since 2007, which now cares daily for an average of 38 children. As she explains, the center is organized to support women so they can have time not just to hold a paying job but to expand their possibilities, to regain some control over their life. The center is qualitatively different from the standard daycare in that it is not a ‘parking lot’ for children, but it is a place of activities focusing on all the needs of a child, physical, educational, emotional. The women who work in the center also try to involve the mothers of the children in the process. Together they discuss what it means to raise a child: this is a question that is central to the work in the daycare and that has forced a constant expansion and innovation of the activities provided.

Rosario: There are now in Bolivia more than 10 million people, more than 1 million and a half children between

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the ages of 0 and 6. They are mostly taken care of by their mothers. But what does it mean to be a mother, what do motherhood and paternity mean? What is the meaning of this social figure? As things are now, women must assume their maternity as their primary, almost exclusive responsibility, but this is something we want to change. The Bolivian state so far has not been able to understand the reality of the mothers and, as a result, it contributes very little to their and their children's reproduction. So far, the state provides a bonus to pregnant women of 200 Bolivianos (Bs) every two month (approximately US\$30) until the child is two years old. It sends a message saying: have more children that the state will protect you. It has a view of women as machines for biological reproduction. It considers women as uteruses. This worries us. *Mujeres Creando* is critical of this view of women and the short term solution the state is offering to mothers. 200 Bolivianos (Bs) is a very small sum, moreover women do not want or need bonuses, they need to have stable sources of employment, especially in a situation where there is a great amount of paternal irresponsibility. Often when men separate from their wives they separate from their responsibility for their children as well; but in many cases they refuse to take responsibility for their children even when they are at home. In this context, the state has now approved another bonus for children from their birth up to two years of age, and then when at six they start school there is a new bonus which is seen almost like a reward. Recently, the mayor of El Alto has proposed to give a bonus also to students who complete a college degree (baccalaureate).

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The municipality and the Prefecture have popular daycares (*guarderías populares*) located in the popular markets for the women who are selling there as well as for the general public. But they are few, there are about 14 in La Paz, and in El Alto they are only 8. The municipality has its daycares, each taking 30 to 40 children, from six months to 5 years of age, but it cannot respond to the demand and what is more worrisome is that the people who do his work are people who are not prepared, they are chosen on the basis of political interest. So the daycares are popular, they are cheap, they are accessible also to other sectors of the populations, but they do not have a vision, an understanding of what is required for the educational development of the child.

What do women do when they do not have childcare available? They try to combine their work activities with the care for the children; many work in the informal trade (*comercio informal*), or in their homes or they leave the children at home alone. Many women do not trust the daycare centers because some have been accused of child abuse and mistreatments. On December 16 an education bill was passed stating that children from the ages 0 to 3 are the responsibility of the family and the community (which in reality means they are taken care of by the mothers or grand mothers, or aunts); then, starting from four, they are taken care by the school system. They cannot recognize what is the real situation. They do not see that very often the family nucleus is constituted just by the mother who must also go to work for money. And who is the community? There is not communal situation in the city, there are no community groups. Probably you have more of a community in the rural areas. In the urban

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areas people are not organized in a communal way. In EL Alto all the women go out to work. If there is a problem with water or light they call an assembly, but there is no neighbors' organization that can take care of the children. This lack of provisions by the Bolivian state makes us think that they do not believe in the future generations. In the very period when children (boys and girls) have the greatest learning capacity there is no recognition of their pedagogical potential. There is a need for daycare in every neighborhood (barrio). The law says that there should be a daycare in all the workplaces, but this is not what happens in reality. Last year the public university asked Mujeres Creando to present a proposal for a day-care center, because they wanted to have their own daycare, to take care of the children of the University's workers. And MC did present them a proposal. What we see is a vacuum in the provision of basic/initial education. The Bolivian state does not open centers with people who are qualified for their jobs, although there are many professionals out there who are; for example at the Popular University in El Alto (UPEA), there are more than 3,500 students in the Education Department, so there is the possibility of opening spaces with people prepared for the task.

Mujeres Creando, that was created in 1992 by Maria Galindo and a team of other women, has developed as a social movement that looks at society from the viewpoint of women, and we have seen the need to put pressure on society on this issue. Starting from 2005, we have had this space, Virgen de Los Deseos (Virgin of Desire) which we have built as a place in which to question the role assigned to women which defines us as one-sided, static individuals. We are questioning that and want to put an end to the

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norms that are imposed on us and that stifle us. We have dealt with many social problems: violence against women, the construction of our autonomous economy. Our objective is to build an autonomous political subject starting from a women's perspective. We have seen the need to enable women to make their voice heard. In 2003, when Sanchez de Lozada (Bolivia's president) left the country, there was a great mobilization of women, but it was mostly men who stood up to speak. This is why for us it is urgent to build this political subject, woman as an active subject. It was as part of this process that we decided to create a daycare center, to free women's time. Generally, you need to get a permit from the municipality and we got it. But we did not get the permit from the *prefectura*. But we have the support of the movement because we do not do anything that violates the dignity of people. This is a space offered to mothers. Initially, we made it available only to popular sectors, especially to children of women in situation of prostitution because they live in very restrictive conditions, and many of them are financially squeezed by the municipality. But over the years we have learned that other women too need this space and they have now the possibility of bringing their children here. So, we began to open our doors to women from other sectors, women who are facing a divorce, who are threatened by men. Providing this space was important to make these women feel safe, to make them feel that they have some political support because we believe in women. It allows women not just to 'work' but to grow, to gain some autonomy, to do things, including helping other women.

The theme of maternity touches all the social systems. It is necessary to break with the image of maternity as

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something that is suffered; we need to create other models, another vision of maternity: a sovereign, creative, rebel maternity, a planned maternity. We need to question the type of maternity that has been imposed. We also need to question the irresponsibility of the fathers, to question their figure as “standard” fathers. But increasingly fathers too are becoming interested in our work. They want to know what is this space that we talk about.

Our daycare is organized along the lines of the Montessori educational model as well as the vision of education articulated by Paulo Freire. Starting from them, we provide a non-sexist education that can develop the educational potential of the new generations. It is a feminist vision. The objective is an integral, holistic development of the person. For example, we provide sexual education, something that is not included in the new education law that that is now into force. Women who teach sexual education at our daycare center are educators who are prepared, we have a team which is well qualified to speak of sexuality, in a way that enables us to reclaim our body as our own and as a sovereign space. We also deal with the question of sexual violence prevention. We have handbooks for the prevention of sexual violence and we work both with the children and with the mothers. It is a work both internal and external. We have meetings and workshops with the mothers; it is a whole process to overcome the fear that women have of this topic. We work above all with the mothers, but now some fathers too want to join. The mothers ask us: why don't you organize a workshop on sexuality for the fathers too? So we have started to have fathers participating in our workshops as well. In the workshops we touch on many themes – nutrition, recre-

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ation and the question of happiness, among other topics of common interest.