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The porous state: female mayors performing the state in Yucatecan Maya municipalities

Key words: racial-ethnic performativity, multiculturalism, Maya, politics

This article analyses how female indigenous mayors manoeuvre, exhibit and transgress gendered, racial and ethnic performances of the state in Yucatán, Mexico. This article asks: How do female *mayors' gendered, racial and ethnic performances affect their decision making?* Indigenous subjects in Latin America have historically not been recognised as part of the state (Hale, 2002). Female mayors are positioned between two places. First, they are the state as they have been democratically elected. Second, they are categorised as female indigenous bodies. This interchange of power relations influences female mayors' decision-making. It will be argued that while some female mayors transform gender and racial norms in their municipalities, others reaffirm them. Whilst some mayors reproduce hierarchical racial-ethnic relations, others have found ways of confronting and utilising existing multicultural policies to create new relations between state and constituents such as incorporating the Maya language and customs in official municipal acts. These actions defy common multicultural practices of toleration and aim to counter the racism constituents have experienced in the past.

The porous state: female mayors performing the state in Yucatecan Maya municipalities

INTRODUCTION

This article examines how female mayors in Yucatecan indigenous municipalities perform the state at a local level. Studies in Latin America have showed the impact of multicultural policies in dictating the type of ‘indigeneity’ accepted by the state (de la Peña, 2006; Hale, 2002; Postero, 2007). While cultural rights are encouraged from the state’s perspective, land appropriation and political autonomy have been less successful. Although certain aspects of indigeneity are considered appropriate in particular scenarios, indigenous people are not seen as ‘representatives’ of the state. I argue that official attitudes have continued to reproduce racist and sexist practices that have constructed the Mexican state as a mestizo male dominated space. Consequently, indigenous women elected as mayors are seen as representatives of the state (elected democratically) and not the state. Female mayors contest and resist these discourses by exposing how they are seen as racially sexualized bodies by other public servers and state offices. Female mayors’ responses towards these practices generate a different relation with constituents as well as create new forms of viewing the Mexican state at a local level. This paper is based on ethnographic work and semi structured interviews with 18 female mayors, close collaborators, and informal conversations with constituents from September 2012 to June 2013.

This article is divided into five sections. First, a theoretical framework is drawn to understand the viewing of the Mexican state as mestizo-male dominated. This section helps comprehend indigenous female mayors as both the state and non-state. This segment adds to existing literature on performativity studies on the influence of the intersectionality of gender, race, ethnicity and space in local politics. The second part of this article is a contextualisation of

politics in Mexico. This section examines how official state positions within multiculturalism are encoded within racism and sexism. The hierarchical relation between rural and urban spaces is explored to understand indigenous women's embodied experiences as mayors. This adds to literature on indigenous female political participation beyond social movements in Latin America which has been 'a relatively under-analysed aspect of indigenous political experiences on the continent' (Gordillo, 2008: 336). It brings to light heterogeneous and complicated notions of gender and race in local politics as well as state forms of racism towards female indigenous mayors (Oehmichen, 2000).

The third section illustrates how female mayors embody the state from the intersectionality of gender, race and ethnicity. The state is seen from a poststructuralist perspective in which state institutions are personified by representatives and public servants accordingly to their gendered and racialised experiences. This viewpoint allows seeing the heterogeneity of the state. This section contributes to postcolonial feminist geography as it analyses to what extent the porosity of the state is shaped by hierarchical notions of power and how state institutions are geopolitically and racially organised (Robinson, 2003). Hence, this section adds to political geography as well as Latin American studies as it demonstrates the influence that racial notions of space and belonging have in local politics. This section also highlights the relationship between the centralised urban government and the rural local state. The fourth section studies female mayors' decision-making. It adds to political geography by demonstrating how notions of gender, race, ethnicity and rural-urban spaces influence how female mayors are perceived by government authorities and their constituency. Such perceptions impact female mayors' decision making and their relationship with local citizens; emphasising how this relationship is dynamic, negotiated and challenged in diverse ways both by mayors and their constituency. Finally, section five explores the way female mayors negotiate and/or confront

multicultural policies. This section analyses the different relation between female mayors and their constituents as well as new forms of state governances at a local level. Concentrating in an often unexamined area, such as Yucatecan indigenous communities, sheds light on how political figures' decision making is influenced by local notions of gender, race, ethnicity and space.

EMBODYING THE STATE TO PERFORM

The Mexican state has been constructed as a mestizo-male dominated space. I argue that the performances of specific gendered-racialised notions create spaces and boundaries of what bodies belong in particular places and which do not. Hence, indigenous women are viewed as 'out of place' when they become mayors as they are now part of the mestizo-male dominated state. In order to comprehend this view, three main theoretical concepts are explored: performativity, space and the state. Judith Butler's gender performativity comes into play as the unconscious attempt on the individual's behalf of being recognised by him/herself and society, being named within the regulatory regime of sex as bodies that matter, which exist and have a rightful place within their community (Butler, 2006: 45). The repetitive nature of performativity is born out of the constant unaware compulsion of the individual to 'perform' gender and heterosexual imaginaries and expectations which he or she can never entirely become, hence the repetition of normative acts. Performativity is by no means a fixed process but is an ever changing way in which different bodies are produced. Gender performativity sheds light on how the communities expected mayors to 'perform' according to their gender (being a mother and wife); and how mayors complied with these expectations, reinforcing them. At the same time, their presence in local politics challenged gender norms. Performativity theory is helpful in comprehending how female indigenous mayors mobilise gender notions differently than their male counterparts in specific places.

Despite its usefulness, Butler's theory lacks an understanding of how individuals are intersected by racial, ethnic and geographical power regimes (Crenshaw, 1989; Hernández Castillo, 2006; Mohanty, 1991; Smith, 2000). Indigenous women are not only subjected to gender power relations but their lives are intertwined by hierarchical structures regarding race, ethnicity and the geography that their bodies occupy. Performativity from Butler's view is not enough to understand the Mexican state as a space of white privilege. Latin American academics have criticised Butler's lack of inclusion of race and ethnicity in her theory (Curiel, 2005). Yuderkys Espinosa (2007) argues that in a Latin American context Butler's performativity theory fails to properly acknowledge subaltern realities. Particularly due to the long colonial-racial past and present and in which 'minorities,' such as indigenous, afro-descendent and non-heteronormative individuals, have had to integrate within the mestizo heterosexual myth. Nonetheless, other studies have taken these criticisms into account and have expanded Butler's work beyond its original intention. Diane Nelson's (1999, 2001) work in Guatemala and Carolin Schurr's (2013^a, 2013^b) research in Ecuador have used Butler's theory to examine the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity and politics. Nelson uses Butler's performativity theory to analyse indigenous political mobilisation after the civil war and its relation to the state. Schurr examined the role emotions play in Ecuadorian local electoral politics. Both these studies understand race and ethnicity as a set of normalising repetitive roles that the individual can never fulfil. Nelson's and Schurr's research helps this article analyse the particular forms in which gender, race and ethnic identities change from the urban capital of Mérida to female mayors' places of origin.

Corporeal appropriations of space depend on how bodies are perceived not only by themselves but by other subjects. This point is important as it contributes to understanding the role space has in articulating bodies as racially gendered. These notions are challenged when

certain bodies (indigenous women) penetrate specific spaces (government). Hence, bodies modify notions of boundaries in multiple ways. These boundaries may be physical ones (city hall, rural-urban localities) or metaphorical ones (state, gender, race and ethnicity). The mobility that a body has between these material and metaphorical boundaries can be exemplified through female mayors in Maya Yucatecan municipalities.

Feminist geographers have demonstrated that gender plays a pivotal role in how spaces are conceived and understood (Davis and Walker, 2010; Christie, 2006; Werner, 2010; Zanotti, 2013). Some have argued that the consideration of public space as masculine can be a plausible factor to why women's presence in public arenas is considered to be intrusive (Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2004; Newcomb, 2006; Staeheli, Kofman and Peake, 2004). In the Mexican context, Margarita Dalton (2003, 2010) has examined how space regulates the behaviour of local female politicians in indigenous municipalities in Oaxaca. She shows how the main-square market becomes a patrolling centre from where rumours and gossip are spread in town to disciplining women's bodies. This coincides with the findings of Oehmichen (2000) regarding female politicians in Guerrero, who move through public space with female chaperons. Lise Nelson has also analysed how municipal spaces influences understanding of gender, race and ethnicity in Mexico. She examined indigenous women's political participation in the 1980's with the purpose to 'further the efforts of feminist political geographers to chart the "mundane" and subjective geography of everyday life and link those geographies to broader political dynamics and conceptual categories' (Nelson, 2006: 369).

Studies carried out in Latin America have proven that race and ethnicity also play a role in delimitating and creating spaces. A particular focus has been examining the negative effect of multiculturalism in the region. For example, urban spaces in Latin America have traditionally been linked to concepts of whiteness (Winders, Jones and Higgins, 2005). Moving from the

country to the city can be linked to a change in how bodies are racially read. Bodies that were previously linked to ethnic ‘minorities,’ in part because of their association with rural spaces, are considered to be more ‘white’ when they move to the city (Radcliffe, 1999). Armstrong-Fumero (2009^a, 2009^b) argues that in Yucatán, the fluidity between whiteness and indigeneity is also expressed in the mobility of rural bodies into urban settings and that this dynamic has been accentuated by the Mexican government’s multicultural rhetoric. That is, official multiculturalism has alienated indigenous people and has heightened hierarchical relations between privilege (urban) population and indigenous (rural) people.

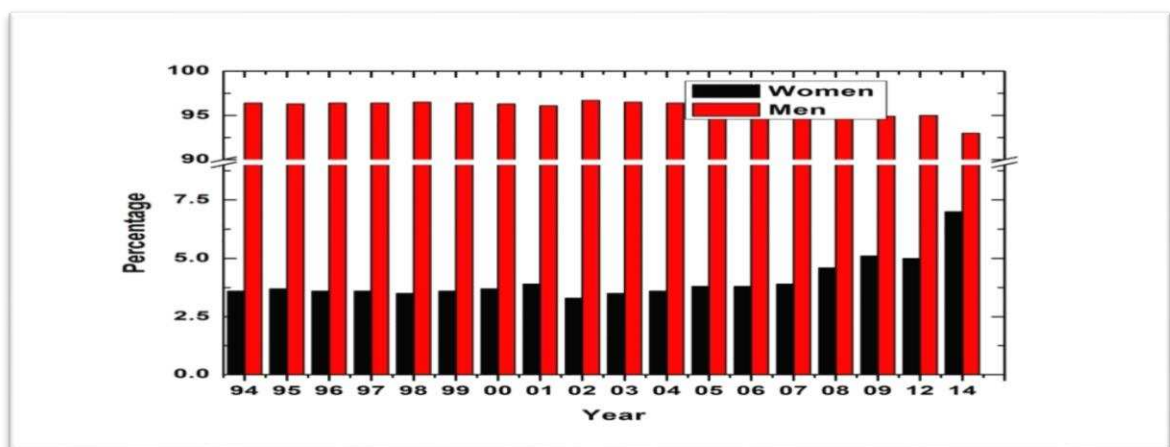
Despite official discourses that promote ‘racial and ethnic’ diversity in Mexico, indigenous people are still viewed as not being worthy of representing the state. In this sense, the state itself is an embodied entity that reproduces specific notions of nationhood, race and gender. In other words, the state is not an abstract being but rather embodied and performed by people: ‘The state is therefore strategically embodied in distinct ways and in relation to different policies and populations’ (Mountz, 2004. 330). The state is neither fixed nor secure but rather consists of a series of acts that are reiterated through state employees and elected politicians in everyday politics. Representatives of the state carry their own gendered, racial and ethnic performances that influence their embodiment of the state. Such interplay of performances from the state to its representatives exposes the slippages, confrontations, negotiations and changes that the state goes through. Hence, the description of the state as porous reflects the fluidity and instability of performances that encompass the state. This view of the state contributes to political geography as it shows how the state is also influenced by rural-urban dynamics. That is the hierarchical relation between urban white spatial notions in the capital (Mérida) represented by state employees and rural indigenous localities represented by female indigenous mayors have an effect on the type of state female mayors embody and their decision-making.

CONTEXTUALISING THE YUCATECAN MUNICIPALITIES

This study was carried out in the Mexican state of Yucatán. In 2010, the total number of residents was 1,955,577; of which 985,549 (50.39%) were indigenous. Yucatán's indigenous population represents the sixth-highest indigenous population in the country (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, CDI, 2014). The state is divided into 106 municipalities. The municipality is the smallest political-administrative entity in Mexico. It is governed by the town council (ayuntamiento), which consists of the mayor and a number of regidores/as and síndicos/as, established by each state. The town council is elected by direct vote every three years.

In Mexico, the presence of women in neighbourhood and peasant organisations and in the lower levels of political parties remains substantial. However, this has not enabled them to capture political power positions, such as in city hall (Barrera Bassols, 1998, 2003). Studying female mayors in Latin America, Alejandra Massolo (2014) found that the countries with the most female mayors were the ones that had implemented some type of quota law. In the Mexican case, quota laws demand that political parties have a minimum percentile of 30-70% of female and male candidates. This law did not apply to mayoral candidacies at the time of this study. The following chart shows the evolution of the percentage of female mayors in Mexico since 1994.

Table 1 Percentage of female mayors in Mexico from 1994 to 2014



Source: Author's elaboration using the following information: For 1994 to 2001, IFE (2001) data; for 2002 to 2009, Observatorio de Igualdad de Género en América Latina y el Caribe (2009); for 2010, INMUJERES (2010); for 2012, the United Nations (http://genero.ife.org.mx/docs/docs_mat-PNUD-1_10jul2012.pdf); for 2014, Instituto Nacional para el Federalismo y el Desarrollo Municipal (2014).

These statistics suggest that the probability of women becoming mayors is small and the importance of studying this topic.

Research on Mexican female mayors commenced in the 1990s and explored which women achieve local power (Barrera, 1998, 2003; Barrera and Aguirre, 2003; Rodríguez and Cinta, 2003; Sam, 2002). They argued that a rise of women in power reduced the gender gap in local politics and helped 'democratise' politics. Few analyses focused on female political participation in indigenous municipalities in Oaxaca and Chiapas (Aguirre, 2004; Aguirre, Barrera, Bonfil, 2008; Bonfil, 2002; Dalton, 2003, 2010). Indigenous women have given new political meanings to traditional organisations like community, party and school committees and have established ethnic and gender aware policies (Bonfil, 2002). Apart from the Chiapas and Oaxaca cases, indigenous women's political participation in Mexico has remained understudied.

In Yucatán for the 2012-2015 period, 21 women were elected as mayors. Eighteen of them agreed to participate in this study. Of the mayors interviewed, eight belonged to PRI, nine to PAN and one to PRD. Sixteen interviewees were married; one was single and one divorced. Only one interviewee did not have children. Regarding female mayors' social background, 5 were teachers, 2 accountants, 2 lawyers, 2 businesswomen and 7 housewives. The majority of the women interviewed had some level of participation in previous political campaigns. Out of the eighteen mayors, 8 of them had relatives (husbands and fathers) that had been mayors before them. Seven were the first female candidates in their localities.

Of the eighteen female mayors interviewed, half of them had at least one Maya surname (Mexico registers two surnames in all legal documentation). Eleven of the mayors spoke Maya

fluently; three understood and spoke Maya to a limited degree and four did not speak or understand the language. This does not mean that some of those who did not speak Maya did not identify as such. In Yucatán, being categorised by the government as ‘Maya’ has depended largely on knowledge of the Maya language. This practice is highly controversial as not all individuals who speak Maya identify themselves as Mayas or vice versa. When one uses the word ‘Maya’ in rural Yucatán, people understand the language but not an ethnic culture or identity. What this reflects is that ‘being Maya’ is not about language but also about how bodies are read and the spaces it occupies, among other things. Being Maya is not about a fixed identity or category but a fluent notion that may change depending on a number of factors. I argue that individuals must perform according to a set of norms that enable him or her to be recognised by society as indigenous. Such performances entail speaking an indigenous language and wearing ‘traditional’ clothing in specific scenarios. Language hence becomes part of the performativity of female mayors in rural indigenous municipalities as policies partially delineate racial-ethnic boundaries. Disciplinary discourses define what ‘indigeneity’ is (Castañeda, 2004). This article offers an interpretation of the way in which Yucatecan dominant political culture polices the types of indigeneity that can be expressed by women in particular places. This reflects that racial and ethnic identities and boundaries are flexible and susceptible to transgression.

Yucatán’s indigenous population is socioeconomically marginalised in comparison with urban non-indigenous communities. Multicultural policies have not had an effect in changing these realities. Regarding the mayors’ municipalities, two had fewer than 3,000 residents, ten had populations between 3-6,000 residents, two had populations of 6-9,000 and, finally, four had over 9,000 residents. In relation to the indigenous population, two had an indigenous population of less than 30%, two had between 30 and 70% indigenous residents, and fourteen had an indigenous population of over 70% (CDI, 2015). These municipalities were at varying distance

from the state capital (Mérida), six being three hours away, seven two hours away, and five are one hour away. This geography is relevant because female mayors had to travel on a nearly daily basis to Mérida for political and administrative reasons.

A vast dissimilarity exists between the urban state capital –Mérida- and the eighteen rural municipalities observed. An example of such contrasts is the total of public schools –preschool, elementary and secondary school- in the capital (1,084) compared to the research’s municipalities, between 4 and 184. Regarding illiterate indigenous population, Mérida has 8.3%. In comparison, three of the localities in this research have between 5-15% indigenous illiterate population and fifteen more than 15% (CDI, 2015). Noticeable disparities also exist between Mérida and the rural municipalities in this study regarding basic coverage (drinking water, drainage, electricity and dirt floors in residents’ houses). Mérida has 5% indigenous population without drinking water. This number coincides with nine of the localities. In contrast, the other nine municipalities have over 5% indigenous population without drinking water. The biggest area of disparity is concerning indigenous population without sewage. While indigenous population in the capital has 10.8% sewage coverage, this percentage is much higher in rural municipalities. Four localities have an indigenous population without sewage of between 20 and 30%, eight have between 30-50% and six over 50%.

THE STATE AS A GENDERED, RACIAL AND ETHNIC EXPERIENCE

Radical feminists like Catherine MacKinnon, Susan Moller Okin and Carole Pateman argue that a ‘legitimate’ feminist critique of state theory is not possible under classical political theories like liberalism and Marxism. These authors see the state as male and as the vehicle of male institutionalised power over women’s body and sexuality. Additionally, radical feminists argue that all women are prone to suffer violence in the hands of the male state and therefore have to

bond over this 'shared' experience. According to this view, males' perspective is the norm and it is expressed through the Constitution, the law and state regulation of women's reproductive and sexual rights (MacKinnon, 1983; Pateman, 1988). This feminist view argues that the presence of women within governmental positions will 'feminise' the state (Dietz, 1985). In Yucatán, male mayors interviewed did not consider adding a 'masculine' feature to their administration.

Contrary to this, over two thirds of female mayors described how their 'female' qualities differentiated their term compared with men. Such 'female characteristics' were more physical contact with constituents, being more patient with them and managing stress better than their male counterparts. This coincides with what Kim Anderson found regarding women leaders in First Nations in Canada (2009). A constant analogy in most of the interviews was comparing the city hall to their homes:

When I am here in the municipality I don't go home. I am here until 11 o'clock, sometimes until early morning. This job [talking and fixing constituents' problems] is like doing laundry. If you do not wash your clothes it just keeps piling up. It is better to see people that day even if it is really late (Interview mayor H, 2012).

Constituents' opinions regarding whether female mayors have different qualities in governing than male mayors varied immensely. Although female mayors are subjected to specific gender stereotypes, the way in which they are intersected by race and ethnicity influenced their particular relation with state officials as well as constituents. Therefore, analysing their experience from a radical feminist view of the state does not say much about the diverse experiences and/or heterogeneous understanding of the category of women, indigenous and the state within specific contexts. Seeing the state from a poststructuralist view allows us to comprehend the multiple levels of performativities that influence local politics (Pringle and Watson, 1998). Poststructuralism shifts the attention away from state institutions toward 'state practices and discourses' (Kantola and Dahl, 2005: 54). Seeing the state as unstable and ever-

changing, reveals the interconnections of power that position female indigenous mayors in a unique situation. The state is performed and ritualised in a series of repetitive acts by elected officials who carry their own personal history reflecting their embodiments of intersecting gender, ethnic and racial regimes. Applied to this research, while female mayors represent the state in their communities, the moment they travel to the state urban capital of Mérida, they encounter racist attitudes towards them by other state officials. In this sense, female mayors are transgressing gender, racial and ethnic spatial notions of what the state is understood to be: male, non-indigenous and urban.

Female mayors in this research, traveled daily to the state capital (Mérida) from their municipalities to attend meetings in federal and regional institutions. In over half the interviews, female mayors experienced racism when interacting with government institutions. Women from rural municipalities who wear the huipil (traditional Maya women's attire) are categorised as indigenous mainly because of their appearance and clothes. In the Yucatecan context, the huipil signifies different things in diverse spaces, demonstrating the interplay of racial-ethnic dynamics. With the implementation of multicultural policies in Yucatán indigenous attire such as the huipil have been seized thus limiting the 'appropriate and acceptable' spaces in which to wear these clothes. As Guzmán Medina (2005) states, the huipil has become the symbol for regional identity, removing its ethnic connotations. Yet, Guzmán Medina argues that indigenous women resist these appropriations by wearing the huipil in different spaces. This issue has been explored in detail by Lorna Macleod regarding the use of the huipil by Maya women in Guatemala: '[the traje] becomes a vehicle to explore the discrimination and discriminatory attitudes towards indigenous women, as well as the strategic claims and resistance that Maya women use against racism' (Macleod, 2014: 163) (My translation). In this sense, clothing is intimately linked to

representations of racial, ethnic and regional identity and of course clothing also marks gender differences.

Of the 18 female mayors interviewed, ten wore huipiles on a daily basis. That is, even though there were not required to do so because of a political event (in Yucatán it is custom for political figures such as the governor and mayors to wear Filipinas –for men- and ternos –for women-). According to participant observation, they wore their huipiles in their municipalities and when visiting the state capital for official visits. All of these mayors identified as Maya and refuse to wear something that they are unaccustomed to wearing. As expressed by a mayor of a locality of 55% indigenous.

I should not be something I am not. For me my image is what I like to wear. The fact that people see me wearing my huipil everyday makes them feel like they can trust me because I am one of them (Interview mayor R, 2012).

This is not to say that female mayors who identify as Maya can only wear huipiles to show resistance to racist discourses and practices. Nevertheless, by wearing huipiles in a constant way in both urban and rural settings, female indigenous mayors destabilise racial-gendered performances of whiteness (Valdivia, 2009). Identity performances are not limited to or solely articulated through the physical space of a municipality, as space plays a vital role in embodiments of femininity and indigeneity. New forms of racism in Mexico have surfaced in the shape of multicultural policies, which establish the disciplining mechanisms or guidelines of acceptable ‘indigeneity’ while at the same time perpetuating a racist discourse that locates ‘whiteness’ above other groups. Hence the study of how multiculturalism has appropriated certain indigenous aspects such as the huipil and the way some female mayors resist these practices exposes how ‘ethnicity, national identity, belonging, and ‘looks’ are all intertwined in the racial politics of the country’ (Saldívar, 2014: 90). Where and who is wearing the huipil can mark the difference between repeating a dominant performance expected in a specific context

(like wearing an huipil at a political event), and a means to express some degree of agency vis à vis racial-ethnic power relations. These performances can expose racism suffered by female mayors when positioned vis à vis different power structures.

In over half the interviews, female mayors acknowledged that they suffered racist attitudes from state bureaucrats. One mayor gave an account of such practices after visiting the regional National System for Integral Development of the Family (DIF) offices. DIF is a Mexican public institution of social assistance that focuses on the welfare of Mexican families. This mayor openly identifies as Maya, has a Maya surname and speaks Maya but does not often wear the huipil. Her municipality is located two hours from Mérida and has over 60% indigenous population:

I have gotten up on many occasions before 6 o'clock to catch the bus to Mérida. This bus takes people to different hospitals and rehabilitation centres. I did this because I wanted to see how my people were being treated. I didn't tell the staff that I was the mayor. I observed how the staff was treating my constituents. The secretaries did not want to help us. It was almost 10 o'clock in the morning. So I just observed and later talked to the director. After almost finishing the conversation, I mentioned that I was the mayor. I told him that I wasn't there to give them a hard time; but they should watch their employees. I cannot even imagine the type of treatment people receive who are not the mayor. What can I expect? If there is a problem in the way my people ask for things, you should let me know. But, if they arrive and no one wants to help them... these people have been up since 6 in the morning, they do not have money to buy refreshments while they wait. They go back home without eating anything. And they arrive [at DIF] and they are mistreated, that is just not right (Interview mayor E, 2013).

Although atypical, mayor E's positioning as a citizen tell us a number of things regarding the relationship between indigenous women and the state. The DIF employee represents the state government. Their demeaning attitudes towards the mayor (without knowing she was the mayor) and constituents reflect hierarchical relations between rural-urban spaces in Yucatán. Rural indigenous municipalities are positioned in a subordinated place in comparison to larger, urban localities (Altay, 2013; Dueholm, 2011; Weiss, 2005). Unequal power relations in Yucatán mean that indigenous female mayors suffer from racist attitudes when travelling to federal and state

institutions in the capital. Radcliffe et.al. found something similar in Ecuador: 'Male and female indigenous leaders face varying degrees of racism and discrimination from urban and mestizo groups. As racially marked, male indigenous mayors are delegitimized vis-a`-vis other officials, making them less effective in galvanising multiethnic support when faced with sceptical white-mestizo populations' (Radcliffe, Laurie, and Andolina, 2002: 299-298). Furthermore, the DIF employee's lack of recognition of mayor E as an authority figure reflects what Marisol de la Cadena has found in Peru (2001); indigenous people are not deemed worthy of being the state. During her interview, mayor E claimed that the DIF employee did not acknowledge her as an authority figure but rather as a constituent. From this perspective, it seems that indigenous people 'are to be "taken care" of by politicians' (de la Cadena, 2008: 342) but not be politicians.

Despite the fact that Mexico declared itself a pluri-ethnic nation in 1992, this has yet to transform racial-ethnic hierarchical relations (Wade, 2011). Multicultural positioning has transformed and perpetuated racist attitudes such as the one suffered by mayor E when visiting regional DIF offices. In Mexico, it is necessary to analyse the subtle yet harmful ways in which mestizaje ideology (a state-racial discourse, in which 'whiteness' or the approximation to it is located in a superior position in relation to other racial-ethnic identities) has transformed into multicultural discourses that sustain racism in the country (Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar, 2015). Despite being democratically elected, female mayors are confronted and challenged by other governmental institutions and employees. People who work in state institutions or are elected representatives not only embody the state but are constantly performing another set of norms regarding gender, ethnicity and race. These performances entail subtle ways of being demeaning towards 'the Other' through normalising practices (de la Cadena, 2001). This 'Otherness' is identified with marginalised groups associated with subaltern spaces (rural, indigenous, female). Hence, female indigenous mayors' presence within the state is questioned by federal and state

institutions (and people) while simultaneously denying that they have racist attitudes towards indigenous female mayors.

Mayor E is the maximum authority in her municipality. In theory, she has more power and influence than the DIF employee. Yet, others' identification of her indigeneity with a negative connotation as well as a client of DIF locates her in a subordinate position. Finally, mayor E is embodying a different type of state. That is, she is a female indigenous mayor from a rural municipality. She is defying gender notions of the state by being a woman as well as racial and ethnic expectations of what state representatives should look (non-indigenous) and where they should come from (urban localities). This type of 'different' state is produced by female mayors' presence in both governmental institutions in Mérida and in their own municipalities. The significance of this is that female mayors, in this case mayor E, is challenging traditional state notions of gender, race and ethnicity as well as finding new ways to interact and represent her constituency. When asked during the interview why she did this exercise (positioning herself as one of her constituents), she stated that she could not understand her constituents, their attitudes and demands if she was not in their shoes. By making the long trip, she was able to understand the obstacles that less privileged people have to go through in order to obtain governmental aid. In interactions with government institutions, constituents seem to have no other option than to put up with demeaning attitudes. By doing this exercise, mayor E is challenging racial and ethnic attitudes towards her constituents. After she was treated badly, she spoke to the DIF director. Only after she was done she revealed she was the mayor. She does not position herself above constituents but tries to remain equal and demand better treatment for them. These actions can be seen as a new form of state embodiment, one that has a more horizontal relationship with constituents.

The experiences of mayor E were echoed by other of the interviewees. They were verbally abused when travelling to the state capital to negotiate funds for their municipalities by ‘white, urban’ pedestrians in the city. People from the capital, especially those from the Northern part of the city (associated with money, power and whiteness) tend to view ‘indigenous’ people as a homogenous groups who have no place in Mérida (Iturriaga, 2011). People are judged by how they look. Female indigenous mayors suffer racism when walking the streets of downtown Mérida, in particular if they are wearing their huipil. The type of gaze and pointing towards female indigenous mayors was evident. Not all of them suffered this type of racism. Six mayors commented that they were treated nicely when visiting state and federal institutions. Of these six mayors, five of them do not have Maya surnames and do not speak Maya. This was not the case with the remaining twelve mayors interviewed; nine of whom have at least one indigenous surname, all speak Maya and identify as such.

HOW GENDER PERFORMANCES AFFECT FEMALE MAYORS’ DECISION-MAKING

Local gender expectations regarding female mayors contribute to their decision making. They are constantly monitored by constituents on whether they are keeping up with their maternal and spousal obligations (gender performance). Female mayors recognised that child rearing affected their decision-making, as it puts women in a disadvantage to male colleagues. Taking care of children can be considered as part of the gender performance that is demanded of female mayors in their municipalities. Gender performativity entails a particular set of norms to be reiterated over time in order to be recognised by society as a ‘woman’ (Butler, 1993; 2006). Being able to perform their roles as mothers is important for female mayors as over two thirds of them mentioned the demands of motherhood as an essential part of their everyday lives. They still had to perform their motherly duties as well as being mayors. In this sense, they are reiterating local

gender norms of what is understood to 'be a woman.' Male mayors mentioned that their wives were the ones taking care of their children. The gender performance of motherhood by female mayors is exemplified by the following quote:

I am a mom of two girls and one boy. Let me tell you, I do everything, a little bit of this, a little bit of that. I make small gaps in my schedule so I can take my kids to their respective activities. I leave here [city hall] about 3 or 4 o'clock; if I have a chance I have lunch; if not, I don't. I take my kids to their activities then go pick them up. I go back home, come to city hall again then go home at around 10 p.m. There is not a moment to rest (Interview mayor P, 2012).

In this quote it is clear how female mayors are continuously performing gender roles alongside their jobs as mayors. The constant going and coming from their houses, children's schools and afterschool activities influences the amount of time they have in city hall. Female mayors have less time at their disposal than male counter-parts. This translates into making decisions quicker than male peers and having longer hours to compensate for the time away from city hall due to their children. However, when female mayors are at home, constituents come looking for them too:

What I don't want to happen is what occurred with the former mayor. His wife received people [in their house] with a bad attitude. You cannot do that. People are the ones that elected you, how are you going to turn your back on them? How are you going to do that? I tend to them in the house or in city hall. I have to make a difference here because I am a woman. Show more sensibility towards things. My doors are always open for people to talk to me, at home and in the office (Interview mayor M, 2012).

A constant in these women's lives is the fact that constituents go to their house at all hours to ask for help. Most of the female mayors interviewed did not feel comfortable with this. Yet, they complied with this practice as they feared that people would start rumours against them. Some expressed this type of activity did not happen as often with male mayors. The practice of going to female mayors' houses extends to their council team, particularly if they are women. As seen in the following quote from the secretary and treasurer of mayor R, people in the locality trust women more to resolve delicate issues because they are mothers and wives. Gender

performance becomes important and influences the relationship between local authorities and constituents.

Researcher: Why do you think people do this [go to your houses]?

Interviewees: Because they know us. They know who we are. As women we are more compassionate. A man will not understand. We know the pain one goes through when your children get sick at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. Another thing is our roots. We come from very poor families and we are proud of that. We know what it is to be hungry because we have gone through it ourselves (Interviewer and treasurer of municipality R, 2013).

The constant patrolling of female mayors as well as the emergence of rumours has influenced self-imposed notions of 'duty' (Izugbara and Undie, 2008). More than half of female mayors continuously verbalised that they have a 'duty' to do a great job during their three years in office. One of the biggest motivators that constantly surfaced in the interviews was the fear of being shunned by constituents after their administration was over.

If I treat people badly people are going to remember that. Then how will they treat me? One of my constituents said: Doña [Mrs. in a kind way] I voted for you but don't let it get to your head because the day you pass me and don't say hello I will step on your foot so you look at me [laughter] (Interviewer and mayor M, 2012).

Female mayors' sense of 'duty' can be interpreted as a new form of state embodiment. Constituents' disciplining practices influence the interaction with female mayors. Female mayors represent the state at a local level, yet they feel obliged to act in a way that differs from their male counterparts. These different interactions involve being more understanding and patient towards constituents. Nevertheless, while female mayors are influenced by such gender expectations from constituents, public opinion may continue to expect a particular persona in a mayor, a male. That is, they continue to view the state as male. As one local congressman told an interviewee regarding how to do her job:

I remembered the words a local congressman said: 'You have to have your trousers put on right [tienes que fajarte bien los pantalones] for this job' (Interviewer and mayor G, 2012).

The expression used by the man politician ‘fajarte bien los pantalones’ reflects how representatives of the state are envisioned as men. That is, men are the ones that use trousers which embody a piece of clothes associated with male gender performativity. Hence, by telling the female mayor to ‘put her trousers correctly’ is a way of informing her what is demanded of her: represent the male state. This opinion seems to coincide with what some constituents thought of a different female mayor. One constituent said the mayor did not have ‘her trousers put on correctly’ [no tiene bien puestos los pantalones]. The women insisted the mayor was not equipped to control the corruption that occurred in city hall. Despite this masculine view of the state, female mayors challenged these sexist notions. While there is still a local expectation that the state is male, female mayors are pressured to continue to perform as women (mothers and wives). Female mayors negotiate within these local and often contradictory views of the state and gender.

A form in which female mayors reposition themselves within these discourses is in their policy making. Over two thirds of female mayors argued that as women, they were more interested in health issues than male mayors. While conducting participant observation, many female constituents commented that one of the biggest changes since female mayors were in power was the restriction of alcohol consumption. Female constituents argued that because there were women mayors, actions had been taken to decrease alcohol consumption amongst the male population. Female mayors’ gender performativity affected their decision-making by restricting cantinas’ [pubs] opening hours and removing drunks from public streets, as exemplified by the following quotes:

That was one of our biggest changes. That was one of people’s expectations that we covered. The day after I entered office, we began to notify cantina [pub] owners that I would enforce a strict selling schedule (Interview mayor R, 2013, municipality with over 7,000 residents).

Society sensed that the former administration was—I am embarrassed to say—that they were alcoholics. They drank a lot. The neighbourhood was like a cantina [pub]. People would drink in the fields and harass girls going to school. The first thing I did when I entered office was to try to change this (Interview mayor H, 2012, with less than 4,000 residents).

This type of decision-making has larger implications of changing the acceptability of male drinking in these municipalities. According to the National Epidemiological Surveillance and Disease Control Centre (CENEVACE) Yucatán occupies the number one spot in alcoholism in the country. Over half of women in Yucatán (52.4%) have suffered domestic violence at the hand of their partners (INEGI, 2015). Of the cases presented in rural municipalities, 97% of them have been associated with alcohol consumption according to the Institute for Gender Equality in Yucatán (IEGY). Female mayor' decision of reducing alcohol consumption can be seen as a bold move within their localities. It is a different way of exercising state power. By limiting alcohol consumption, female mayors are contesting hegemonic masculine order. Other forms in which female mayors' decision-making transformed gender norms was through the implementation of sport activities.

Subverting gender performativity through sports activities

This section examines how sports activities transformed state relations with constituents, particularly women. The first case is the implementation of Zumba lessons in mayor E's ayuntamiento (4,600 residents and 95% indigenous population). It is located two hours from the state capital. The mayor identifies as Maya, has one Maya surname and fluently speaks Maya. Two months into her administration she started a women's Zumba lesson programme. The mayor herself participated in the classes.

Women told me they wanted to do something related to sports but they were embarrassed. There is still a taboo in the pueblo [town] that if you go out it is because you are with another man or it is misinterpreted. I asked them if they would like me to

bring a Zumba instructor to give them lessons. At first they didn't want to do it because they were embarrassed and didn't want anyone looking at them. A lot of them did not have trainers. So I told them that I would give them trainers with a 50% discount (Interview mayor E, 2013).

Zumba lessons transformed gender notions as women were breaking taboos by going out. With Zumba lessons, these women were reclaiming public spaces. This did not come easy as the lessons first were carried out in an enclosed space. Women's reluctance to carry out the lessons in public at the beginning is a reflection of the gender patrolling they were submitted to in their localities:

The first class was done on the field. By the next class they wanted to do it somewhere else that was closed so nobody could see them. So I told them that they could do it behind city hall. But then they started to complain that the policemen were staring at them in a lustful way [morboseando]. So then I told the policemen that if they continued I would have to put something up. Their wives also came to class [laughter]. Then it started to rain so they went inside city hall. I have always said that city hall is the pueblo's. So they started the class. That day I felt very happy because I felt accepted as mayor because you could see young and old people from all political parties just dancing and laughing. I was happy that they were no longer afraid, their self-esteem was higher. They would dance even if everyone was looking (Interview mayor E, 2013).

By scolding the policemen, the mayor is reaffirming her position as the maximum authority. She is transgressing gender boundaries by locating herself above the municipal policemen. Women's eventual appropriation of city hall also entails a different relationship with the state. This is reaffirmed by the mayor's expression 'city hall is the pueblo's.' Indigenous women's interaction with the state (represented by the mayor) becomes a more inclusive and pleasant experience. The culmination of the altering of gender norms with Zumba lessons was a public display during the municipality's anniversary, an event that attracts migrants to return.

Women asked the mayor to join them:

I asked them during a class if they wanted to do one on this day and they asked me if I would join them. I said yes. I gave them pink anniversary t-shirts. On the back of the shirts it read: 'Because I am a different woman, I am active.' So when it was time, they went looking for me. I changed from my formal attire into my shirt and trainers. I felt

wonderful. In that moment you no longer saw women that didn't accept themselves, all of them got together for one thing (Interview mayor E, 2013).

The public demonstration of women's Zumba lessons appropriated municipal space, changing gender performances of the bodies that have a right to occupy public sites and the type of performances deemed 'decent' for women in the municipality. Yet, by wearing the colour pink (commonly associated with women) they are still reinforcing particular gender performances. The changing of the mayor's clothes from her 'formal' attire to the pink t-shirt is an interchange of gender and state performance. She is reaffirming specific gender roles at the same time she is becoming an equal with the women that participated in the event. Arguably, the mayor is embodying a different type of state, one that is more accessible to lower class indigenous women.

Another example of alternative ways of representing the state is the creation of a women's softball league in a municipality of under 8,500 residents and 89% indigenous population, one hour and a half from Mérida. Mayor R identifies as indigenous and speaks Maya although not fluently; she wears huipiles on a regular basis. As indicated in the quote below, constituents were surprised that the mayor participated in these activities:

Interviewee: I have always liked softball. And I came up with the idea that we should do an all-female league.

Researcher: What was people's reaction when they saw you play?

Interviewee: [laughter] Well first of all I am first base, the most important one!

[laughter] They like it, they like it. Between going to the capital and meetings I squeeze some time to play softball with them. I like that people see me (Interview mayor R, 2013).

This quote reveals the different ways in which this specific mayor embodies the state as well as the type of relationship the state has with female constituents. By slipping from one state performance (formal meeting in the capital) to another (playing softball), this mayor navigates among diverse state practices. It reflects a more grounded relationship with female constituents, as she is seen as an equal. As this section has demonstrated, female mayors' decision-making is

influenced by specific gender expectations in their municipalities. Female mayors manoeuvre amongst such notions, reaffirming particular gender performances while altering other gender norms. Such changes translate into new form of interaction between female constituents and mayors, as the following section shows.

NAVIGATING MULTICULTURALISM IN RURAL YUCATECAN MUNICIPALITIES

State multicultural policies have appropriated aspects of the Maya culture partly for financial reasons. A consequence of these policies has been to allocate more resources to municipalities if they have certain features (pyramids, dramatization and recreation of Maya customs) for domestic and foreign tourism. Such policies have impacted the way some female mayors position their municipalities vis-à-vis federal and regional institutions. An example of this is mayor P, who does not identify as indigenous but has a Maya surname. Her municipality is 30 minutes away from the capital and has a low percentage of indigenous people:

It is a shame that the Maya language is getting lost. People feel embarrassed and say they do not know how to speak Maya. My mum understands Maya but doesn't know how to speak it. I cannot understand nor speak it. Now it is pivotal to know Maya. I keep telling people that Americans come to hear and see our culture, our traditions. But we are losing all of that. If we keep going like this we will not be able to receive any federal or state resources because we won't have anything to offer foreigners (Interview mayor P, 2013).

Rural municipalities are not considered profitable by federal and state institutions like CDI if they do not possess tourist attractions, receiving less money. This influences some female mayors' decision making in changing municipal space, in order to obtain more resources for their municipality:

I was really interested in getting people to know where we are. That the people that come here leave with a good impression. We are now painting Nachi Cocom's palace. This is a building that gives us a lot of pride because of the Caste War. What do we want? By the end of 2014 [we want this municipality's] image like the one Izamal [a

common tourist stop, known as the Yellow city because of the buildings painted yellow] has (Interview mayor R, 2013).

Municipal improvements are performances involving selective reiteration of racial and ethnic discourses. By changing the municipality's image to be consistent with the state's multicultural policies, mayor R aims to attract tourism, which hopefully will generate employment. Painting municipal buildings 'hacienda' (yellow and terracotta) colour and promoting the municipality as a symbol for the Caste War period (1847-1901, one of the most important indigenous rebellions in the history of Yucatán), the municipal space performs national and ethnic history for lucrative ends. Female mayors' decision-making is influenced by regional state discourses and in turn tends to embody a particular form of indigeneity. Nevertheless, as the following quote demonstrates, this female mayor's actions were not entirely constrained by state multicultural discourse.

On October 12 we celebrated Nachi Cocom, who is our Maya leader. We sang the national anthem in Maya. It is a beautiful anthem when you hear it in Maya, it is a really nice feeling (Interview mayor R, 2012).

Recognising Nachi Cocom, an important Maya leader in history, and singing the national anthem in Maya is envisioning a new kind of state. This type of government is innovative as it is legitimising indigenous people and their role in local history as well as trying to engage in a more horizontal relationship with its constituency. This novel embodiment re-territorialises Maya practices with a political connotation. While this mayor is on the one hand changing her municipality into a tourist stop (reproducing official state multicultural policy), she is utilising these same practices in a critical way (Harris, 2009). Another form in which this mayor challenged official state multicultural discourses was through the incorporation of the Maya language in city hall:

We are trying to put the most common words that people use in the [municipal] buildings, so that people who do not know them can read them and people who know

how to say some things in Maya can learn how to write them. So we get used to seeing them. I think this is a mass education, it is our Maya language (Interview mayor R, 2012).

Painting Maya words into the wall of the ayuntamiento (a space traditionally linked to non-indigenous bodies) has a very powerful message. By incorporating Maya words in a semi-permanent way into city hall, the mayor is legitimising Maya as an official municipal language even if Maya is not recognised as an official language in Yucatán. This type of action is effectively remaking the state in a different image, one that legitimises indigenous people and their language.

Another example of subtle ways of changing state performances is the reincorporation of Maya traditions in municipal anniversary celebrations. Mayor E integrated traditional Maya customs with the municipal anniversary.

I am very proud that I am indígena [indigenous], of being Maya. We had a competition called palo encebado [greased stick] It is a stick about 7 metres long and you drip it in pig fat and it becomes slippery with the heat. We had teams of 4 or 5 people that worked together to reach the top. It had been years since these activities were done. In the cities, these activities are no longer done. It is important that young people start to appreciate them and want to continue to do them. People who leave the pueblo say that they are not Maya; that they are not from here. I think that we have to value these things again. I have always said that I am indígena, I am masewalob [indigenous in Maya]. It is in my blood, in my last name. I am not ashamed of this. I am proud because I know I have roots and where I come from. It all depends on the value you give it (Interview mayor E, 2013).

The decision to integrate Maya customs with the municipality's anniversary celebration reflects a particular embodiment of the state that differs from the norm (urban and non-indigenous). This female mayor is revalorising these customs and by extension rural, indigenous people.

Effectively, this extends beyond multiculturalism to a process that seeks to overrun hierarchies of difference and to directly challenge the racism constituents have experienced in the past. The mayor starts her testimony saying she is proud to be indígena (indigenous) and she closes her statement in the same manner. By repeating those words, the female mayor stresses her own

indigeneity. This affirmation is legitimising female indigenous bodies as worthy of not only being the state but transforming it into something novel. Examining subtle yet powerful ways of transforming the state such as incorporating Maya customs and language into state activities and spaces contributes to better comprehend the day to day dynamics between state representatives and constituents. Second, it sheds light to subtle, small and yet powerful ways in which female indigenous mayors defy traditional understandings of the state as a mestizo and urban space.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that official state discourses continuously articulate misogynistic and racist attitudes. The outcome has been a mestizo male dominated state. Thus, newly elected female indigenous mayors are seen as part of the state and non-state. The state is composed of diverse institutions and people which perform a particular set of gender, racial and ethnic norms which influence relations amongst diverse government employees. This article examined to what extent the ‘porosity’ of the state has been formulated by hierarchical notions of power. This analysis is exemplified by how indigenous female mayors are treated in the urban capital by state employees. This highlights the heterogeneity of public servants as well as elected officials and therefore, the state. Uncovering the diverse levels of power relations between the urban state government and local rural municipalities allows a better comprehension of the ways female mayors encounter, confront and/or reproduce sexist and racist attitudes towards them and their constituents. These contradictory dynamics (of raced and gendered state and non-state) are engraved in female indigenous mayors’ bodies and create new forms of the Mexican state at a local level. As this article has shown indigenous female mayors have to some extent unsettled hierarchical gender, racial and ethnic power relations through their presence and actions (wearing

the huipil, limiting alcohol consumption, implementing female sports activities, using Maya language in city hall, etc.). However, there are important questions that have yet to be answered. What are (if any) the long term effects of having indigenous women in local power in their communities and in more macro sense, to the state? How do constituents feel about the way indigenous female mayors governed? Would interviewees have taken different actions or attitudes towards the state (and its employees)? As this article has demonstrated it is not enough to create and implement public policies (such as multicultural and gender equality) if they don't consider state bureaucrats, employees and elected officials' own gender, racial and ethnic performances. Continuing to answer questions such as the ones posed above will allow a better understanding of the ways 'the state' changes and how it is confronted in diverse ways by individuals both within and out of it.

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