

THREE VIGNETTES: ENCOUNTERING WOMEN IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

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

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

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

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



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

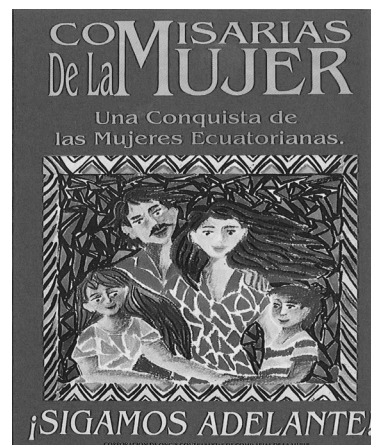
“This political space I am occupying is a space
from which women and especially Shuar women
have always been excluded.”

Figure 1: Diana Ataimant in the National Assembly

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

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

Figure 2: Leaflet of the National Women's Office



1.

INTRODUCING POLITICAL CHANGE IN ECUADOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

riers that women face on their way to electoral offices (for an overview see Norris and Inglehart 2001), too little has been said about the way political subjectivities and spatialities are made through the everyday practices and performances on the local political stages like the plaza where a campaign event takes place, the saloon of the municipality where the town council meets or a school which is inaugurated by the mayor. This book seeks to shed light on the way political subjectivities are produced and reproduced in the daily encounters on these diverse political ‘stages’ by asking: How are the subjectivities of politicians and the spatialities they bring into being gendered, racialized, ethnicized and classed through the practices, performances and interactions between the politicians, their audience and the time-spatial context they are embedded in? And, how do these practices, performances and interactions contribute to social change and processes of decolonization?

SEARCHING FOR A FEMINIST ELECTORAL GEOGRAPHY

Being immersed in the messy everyday business of local politics in Ecuador, I came to understand that electoral geographies are far more than electoral outcomes, which political and electoral scientists – including electoral geographers – preferably deal with when engaging with issues about the gendering or ethnicization of politics. To understand the processes of political change in Ecuador, for example, it was crucial to look at the relation between electoral and social movement politics rather than to stop investigating at the doorsteps of political institutions. To grasp the notion and meaning of gendered or ethnic identity performances in electoral campaigns, it was necessary to look back at the (post-)colonial history of political citizenship in Ecuador. To sense why citizens were so excited about the new president Rafael Correa, one had to be immersed in the crowds cheering at him. These three little empirical examples identify some of the key issues of an electoral geography that goes beyond electoral processes and results. As this book will show, antagonistic relations between different political communities, everyday performances of intersecting identities, and emotions³ all play a crucial role in the construction of spaces of institutionalized politics.

3 Recent discussions in human geography differentiate between emotions as social constructions and affects as direct bodily, pre-cognitive, biological forces (see Pile 2010, Thien 2005, Thrift 2009). I use these two terms synonymously arguing that the differentiation (and dichotomization) between emotions and affects does not recognize that ‘even seeming direct responses actually evoke past histories, and that this process bypasses consciousness, through bodily memories. So sensations may not be about conscious recognition, but this does not mean they are “direct” in the sense of immediate.’ (Ahmed 2004a: 39).

Despite the fact that the analysis in this book goes far beyond the study of electoral results, I still situate the book in the subfield of electoral geography. The reasons for this are twofold. First, the book focuses on the gendering of institutionalized politics and elections. While elections and national politics have for a long time been the ‘heart’ or bread-and-butter business of political geography, feminist political geographers have called (successfully) for the need to open up the narrow, masculinist, and state-centered perspective of mainstream political geography (see e.g. Dowler and Sharp 2001, Hyndman 2004, Kofman 2008, Kofman and Peake 1990, Schurr and Fredrich 2011, Staeheli, Kofman, and Peake 2004). Challenging the gendered binaries about the key analytical categories of political geography such as private/public spaces, formal/informal politics, reason/emotion (Brown and Staeheli 2003, Brownill and Halford 1990, England 2003, Fincher 2004a, Sharp 2003, Staeheli 1996, Staeheli and Mitchell 2004), feminist political geographers have argued that

‘the political is not just relevant to elections, the state and the international conflict, [but] it is seen in the ways in which women mobilize at the grass roots, in the ways an ethic of care is brought into political discourse, in the ways masculinity and femininity are invoked in ideas of nation and international conflicts’ (Staeheli and Kofman 2004b: 6).

In an attempt to acknowledge the call of feminist political geographers to expand the boundaries of political geography beyond issues of elections and state politics, it would be counter-productive from a feminist perspective to reduce the wide field of political geography again to elections and institutionalized politics (even if understood in a broad sense). Hence, rather than situating my study in political geography, the book develops what I call a feminist electoral geography in an effort to recognize the importance of not conflating political geography with (and constraining it to) electoral geography. It rethinks electoral geographies by sketching new ways to approach electoral geographies theoretically through theories of antagonism, performativity, and intersectionality, empirically through focusing on the local, the body and emotions, as well as methodologically through (visual) ethnographies and feminist postcolonial approaches.

Second, developing explicitly a feminist *electoral* geography, I argue that feminist political geographies have neglected institutionalized and electoral politics in their attempt to refocus attention on diverse political settings beyond the state, such as social movement politics (Conway 2008, Gruszczynska 2009) or politics of care (England 2003, Pratt 2004). While feminist political geographies’ broadening of what gets counted as political subject matter is a positive move, it has unfortunately, according to Barnett and Low (2004), led to a problematic rejection of what is seen as ‘ordinary’ political subject matter, such as elections and political parties. This rejection not only ‘runs the risk of jettisoning any concerns for the realms in which politics most obviously still goes on’ (Barnett and Low 2004: 6), but also misses the fact that institutionalized politics are one of many sites where decisions are taken that shape women and men’s lives in different ways. Hence, we need to recognize that feminist political geographies must refocus attention on the gendered dimension of institutionalized politics and elections.

In my attempt to develop a feminist electoral geography that deals with the messiness of everyday political life in post-colonial Ecuador, I have been inspired by different theoretical strands that electoral geographers have not yet engaged with and which I would like to introduce to electoral geography and electoral studies in general. In so doing, the book aims to contribute to broader debates in political geography by developing a (feminist) electoral geography that is inspired and builds on geography's recent turn(s)⁴ towards practices and performativity, the body and embodiment, and affect and emotion. Political geographies have engaged to different extents with these new turns and I therefore argue that political and electoral geographies can equally benefit from a fuller engagement with the conceptual implications of these turns.

The performative turn can be understood as direct response to the focus on texts and representations that has dominated new cultural geographies by shifting attention to the performances and practices of everyday life (Boeckler and Strüver 2011, Dirksmeier and Helbrecht 2008, Gregson and Rose 2000, McCormack 2009, Nash 2000, Pratt 2004, Strüver and Wucherpfennig 2009, Thrift 1997, Thrift 2003). Scholars in political geography and critical geopolitics have for quite a while now criticized their disciplines for their 'mesmerized attention to texts and images' (Thrift 2000: 381), advocating a 'critical geopolitics that is more attuned to everyday practices' (Müller 2008: 329) and 'everyday-life geopolitics' (Paasi 2006: 217). Nick Megoran's (2005, 2006) ethnographic work on the impact of the partial closure in 1999–2000 of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley boundary or Sara Koopman's (2011) long-time ethnography of international peace accompaniers in Colombia are excellent examples of how the practice turn has been integrated in political geography and critical geopolitics. In electoral geography, however, such an engagement with the everyday practices of campaigning, canvassing, voting, organizing and governing has scarcely taken place.

The focus on practices has implied an increasing interest in processes of embodiment and the body itself (Colls 2007, 2012, Harrison 2000, Longhurst 1997, 2001, Mahtani 2002, McDowell 2009, Nelson 1999b, Simonsen 2013, Slocum 2008, Strüver 2005a). Feminist geopolitics and feminist political geography have been at the forefront of thinking about the embodiment of political actions and the role of bodies in the construction of (geo-)political spaces such as the nation (Faria 2013, Marston 1990, Mayer 2004, Radcliffe 1996, 2000, Radcliffe and Westwood 1996). In their seminal paper 'A feminist geopolitics', Dowler and Sharp (2001: 169) advocate

4 While the performative turn, the practice turn, the affective turn are often referred to as different turns, they can all be considered as reactions and responses to new cultural geographies' focus on texts and representations (for an overview over the critique see Thrift and Dewsbury 2000).

‘recognising the inherent and unavoidable embodiment of geographical processes and geopolitical relationships at different scales. In order to rewrite the everyday experiences of individuals back into geopolitical events, academics are relating the scale of their investigations from the global and national to that of the community, home and body’.

Jennifer Fluri’s (2011a, 2011b) work on the embodied geopolitics of the recent political conflict in Afghanistan is exemplary for a feminist geopolitics that redeems Dowler and Sharp’s call. Fluri highlights the corporeal as a key site of analysis for the everyday and seemingly apolitical spaces occupied by civilians living amidst political conflict. The work of Sara Smith (2011, 2012) and Banu Gökariksel (2009, 2011) show how women’s bodies are turned into sites of political struggle. Smith’s ‘intimate geopolitics’ discusses how in the Leh District of India’s Jammu and Kashmir State, political conflict between Buddhists and Muslims has been articulated in part through women’s bodies by preventing inter-religious marriages. In a similar vein, Gökariksel considers women’s headscarves in Turkey as objects of political struggles and shifting embodied expressions of political ideologies. The feminist electoral geography I seek to develop builds on this body of literature in feminist political geography and feminist geopolitics, asking how bodies matter in the construction of electoral spaces and how differently gendered, racialized, ethnicized and classed bodies matter in different ways in particular political sites.

Despite the recent boom in geographies of emotion and affect (Anderson and Smith 2001, Bondi, Davidson, and Smith 2005, Davidson, Bondi, and Smith 2005, McCormack 2006, Pile 2010, Sharp 2009b, Smith et al. 2009b, Thien 2005, 2011, Tolia-Kelly 2006, Woodward 2011), Pain et al. (2010: 973) argue that emotional geographies have been oriented ‘more towards social, cultural and environmental dimensions, than mapping out the political geographies of emotion’. Still, this book has benefited immensely from insights of emerging work under the label of ‘emotional geopolitics’ (Dodds and Kirby 2012, Katz 2007, Pain 2009, 2010, Pain et al. 2010, Pain and Smith 2008, Wright 2008) and ‘politics of affect’ (Barnett 2008, McCormack 2006, Thrift 2004, 2009). On the one side, ‘emotional geopolitics’ have focused my attention to the way ‘emotions [are] experienced as simultaneously *both* local *and* global’ (Pain 2009: 476) and the need to ‘incorporate emotions in nuanced and grounded ways’ (Pain 2009: 474) in political analysis. Translating these claims into electoral geography has meant for me to question how feelings of citizens in local events are connected and related to national and international current and historical events, analyzing the encountered emotions on different scales. The second strand that has informed my thinking consists of discussions taking place in non-representational geographies about the politics of affect. Non-representational approaches taught me to pay more attention to the ‘systematic engineering of affect’ (Thrift 2004) in electoral politics. While I critically question many of the assumptions of this body of work, such as its lacking attention to social and bodily differences (Colls 2012, Thien 2005, Tolia-Kelly 2006) or the primacy given to the unconscious (Bondi 2005a, Korf forthcoming, Schurr forthcoming), I found it rewarding to sense with my own