

**Plurinational Bolivia Protects Low German Mennonites:  
Reading “Ghost Rapes” in the Media**

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In 2006, Evo Morales became the first indigenous president of Bolivia. Under his tenure, Bolivia reconceived of itself as an *Estado plurinacional*; in other words, a state where the center pays attention to the margins, particularly to the indigenous groups that make up at least sixty per cent of its population. This plurinational posture, affirmed by a 2009 referendum, was enshrined in a new constitution later that same year.<sup>1</sup> According to scholar of development Lorenza Belinda Fontana, this new constitution gives a greater level of autonomy to municipal, departmental and regional groups than the previous constitution (197).<sup>2</sup> Luis Tapia, a prominent Bolivian Marxist, provides historical context for these changes.<sup>3</sup> He explains that the Bolivian state was able to lessen its control over its territory in these ways only after

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<sup>1</sup> I follow Fontana and translate *plurinacional* as plurinational, because it emphasizes the state’s rhetorical desire to meet indigenous *nations* on their own terms. Multicultural would reduce specific people groups to cultural norms or forms of interpersonal communication and multinational connotes corporate take-overs.

<sup>2</sup> The constitution specifies that indigenous groups have rights over their national resources as well as the right to exercise their own judicial, economic and political systems (“República de Bolivia,” 30-I-17; 30-II-17).

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Tapia and his relationship with current Bolivian Vice President Álvaro García Linera (2006-present), see Baker’s article.

land reforms and changes to the educational system that had taken place in the 1990s (Tapia 3). Some Bolivians have responded positively to these changes in their country. Political scientist Rafael Bautista, for example, argues that the new constitution encourages rethinking what it means to be a Bolivian people and is an opportunity to re-examine the Bolivian political sphere (26). Yet, between 2009 and 2012, Bolivians protested their government's actions. In the city of La Paz, they marched against rising gasoline prices, evoking the 2003 Gas Wars that had forced President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (1993-1997; 2002-2003) to step down and flee the country (Baker). Fontana adds that rural indigenous Bolivians have protested highways being build on their land without their consent (Fontana 200). The early legacy of the plurinational state, then, appears to be a mixed one.

These political scientists and the constitution do not compare these new autonomies to ones that were granted to the *Plautdietsch* or Low German-speaking Mennonites by the Bolivian government in 1962.<sup>4</sup> Although these autonomies merit comparison, there is a paucity of information about the relationship between regional autonomy and the potential that legal exceptions for these 23,000 Mennonites in Bolivia may change.<sup>5</sup> Bolivianists perhaps neglect this group as it is a small religious minority, and those scholars working on issues of autonomy justifiably focus on the fact that the plurinational state arose from a longstanding struggle for indigenous rights. Scholars of Mennonites also avoid this question. Their work discusses Low German Mennonites in Bolivia in relation to Mennonites in other countries rather than analyzing how any one country—in this case Bolivia—perceives its Mennonite minority.

These Mennonites, a religious group with a particular relationship to technology and to modernity, first immigrated to Bolivia in the 1950s. Then, in the 1960s, the government of President Víctor Paz Estenssoro (1952-1956; 1960-1964; 1985-1989), sought a whiter and more European-looking population to better

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<sup>4</sup>I use the term Low German Mennonite or simply Mennonite, to refer to this group. Some scholars use the term Old Colony, to refer to the largest and most conservative Mennonite church group in Latin America. Low German Mennonites speak Low German, and the vast majority in Latin America educate their children and communicate in writing in German. For more information on the Low German language see Cox, Driedger and Tucker's article.

<sup>5</sup>In 2013, the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO)* gave this estimate without elaborating on whether this is the total number of colony members or baptized church members. The latter would be a smaller number as Mennonites join the church upon baptism as adults. In either case, this is a small minority in a country with an estimated population of 10.67 million ("Bolivia: 2013 Update").

Bolivia's agricultural production. This pattern of encouraging white immigration in order to better the nation has been a trend in Bolivia since at least the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Aronna 185). But the Paz Estenssoro government, unlike earlier ones, granted the Mennonites multiple autonomies (Cañas Bottos 61). This encouraged many more Mennonites to immigrate to Bolivia from Canada and from Mexico. Since then, Bolivian Low German Mennonite men have not been required to perform military service and the larger community has been granted freedom in education, welfare, municipal governance and property ownership (Loewen 119-125).<sup>6</sup> It is unclear which autonomies they will be able to exert in the plurinational state and it is possible that some autonomies regarding education and landownership will be revoked. Tim Huber's "Fragile Privileges in Bolivia: Colony Schools, Land at Risk if Decree is Signed," for instance, mentions that Morales may eliminate titles to land acquired by Low German Mennonites in the past fifteen to twenty years.<sup>7</sup> This could establish a precedent that would eliminate other exceptions for Mennonites.

I begin the conversation between scholars of Mennonites and scholars of Bolivia by exploring the relationship between Bolivian culture and society and Low German Mennonites and their autonomies. To do so, this article examines representations of Low German Mennonites in Bolivian popular culture, taking into account that such an approach cannot offer an accurate or complete understanding of Low German Mennonites in Bolivia or of Bolivia itself. I choose to focus on the most prominent example of contact between the two groups as exposed by the Bolivian media. This would be the news coverage of the 2009 arrest and 2011 trial of eight Low German Mennonite men who were accused and convicted of raping over sixty Mennonite women and girls. News reports about the trial explain that they were called "Ghost Rapes" because they were initially blamed on ghosts or on the devil acting in the middle of the night. In trial, it surfaced that a group of men had purchased poison from a local veterinarian and gassed the homes of many families,

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<sup>6</sup> Bolivia may have wanted to prove itself to Paraguay after losing the Chaco War (1932-1935) by attracting immigrants from the same religion that had made significant contributions to the Paraguayan economy. Since the majority of Mennonites in Paraguay advocate higher levels of education than the more conservative Mennonites in Bolivia, the legacy of Mennonites in Bolivia is mixed. For more information, see Loewen's *Village Among Nations*.

<sup>7</sup> Huber stated that according to his sources in Bolivia, no such decree has been signed but that it remains a possibility ("Re: Mennonites in Bolivia").

rendering them unconscious. The men then raped women and girls, who would wake up without knowing what had happened. Each rapist maintains his innocence.<sup>8</sup>

This article examines the Bolivian representation of these rapes as a way to study how Bolivians perceive the Low German Mennonite minority. I have selected this instance not only because it is a prominent example of contact between the two groups, but also because the arrest occurs at the same time as the new Bolivian constitution was enacted, in 2009, and the 2011 trial occurs as the country was beginning to deal with the implications of its new posture towards indigenous people. The reports in newspapers, on television and in documentary film give voice to the husbands' and fathers' experiences. Their sensationalistic tone suggests that the Bolivian justice system needs to protect Mennonite *men* because they are weaker given that they are religiously prohibited from being vengeful towards the rapists. This implies that Mennonite integration into the Bolivian legal system is positive, a perception that discourages plurinationalism, at least in dealing with crimes. Some feminists have made a similar argument about the Bolivian president's patriarchal or protectionist attitude towards the Bolivian people. The representations of the Ghost Rapes, then, may illuminate broader trends in Bolivia.

In order to explore these connections, I first outline autonomies in Bolivia and how this may relate to the representation of Mennonites in popular culture. I survey other studies of these representations and elaborate on the Bolivian constitution, specifically the role it grants women and indigenous people. My discussion then turns to television news, a documentary, online comments and news articles that represent the Ghost Rapes.

### *Minorities in Popular Culture*

The Mennonites' autonomies, although not mentioned in the media, or in Bolivia's new constitution, align with those the constitution grants to departments and regions. These new autonomies, moreover, are typically conceived of under the umbrella of indigenous rights. They are significant for many reasons, especially because these autonomies, for both Mennonites and indigenous people, extend to the judicial realm. In most cases, Mennonites exercise this autonomy and choose to

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<sup>8</sup> I employ the terms "victims" and "rapists" when describing the crimes, as these are the terms used in the media and because in a Bolivian court of law one is guilty until proven innocent. Huber's articles for the *Mennonite World Review*, such as "8 convicted in Bolivia Rape Trial" explore Bolivia's troubling legal system and the fact that many of these men could have been scapegoats paid off by powerful aggressors within the Manitoba Colony.

resolve their own disputes. Yet, since the Ghost Rapes were such a serious case, they did not resolve them in their colonies. They instead reported the crime to Bolivian authorities, believing that the rapists should be prosecuted there.

In popular culture, Low German Mennonites are often perceived as belonging to the land. This may be because Mennonites have historically been farmers and small business owners, and in most Latin American countries, religious leaders discourage Mennonites from leaving their land-based lifestyles.<sup>9</sup> They appear on their farms and in isolated colonies in Latin American film, photography and other media.<sup>10</sup> In general, though, there are few examples of Low German Mennonites in Bolivian popular culture. Their most notable appearance is through Catalan photographer Jordi Busqué's 2014 Getty award-winning collection of portraits of the community in markets in the city of Santa Cruz, in their schools and in their churches (Fidler). Most representations of Low German Mennonites in Latin American popular culture come from Mexico and maintain Busqué's pastoral imagery, or adopt only a mildly critical stance. Some, like the Mexican television series *Los héroes del norte*, make fun of the Mennonite fame for dairy production. The series includes a character called Friedrich, nicknamed "el Menona," who is a lactose-intolerant Mennonite who runs away from his family to join a musical group he meets while selling them cheese at a local strip club.

There is little analysis of Mennonites in these examples of popular culture, with the exception of critical approaches to Carlos Reygadas' film *Silent Light*.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, my argument follows studies of the representations of the Mennonites, and a related group, the Amish, in US culture. David Weaver-Zercher's *The Amish in the American Imagination*, for instance, contextualizes the Amish in US history, explains their legal exceptions in the realm of education, and then explores the implications of how the Amish are represented in US music, film and narrative fiction (5-10). He concludes that these representations complicate a pastoral perception of the Amish and suggest that they are more integrated than they would like to believe into the United States (Weaver-Zercher 196). Similarly, Steven P. Carpenter's *Mennonites and Media: Mentioned in it, Maligned by it, and Makers of it* narrates Mennonite history,

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on the religious aspects of this behavior, see Loewen and Cañas Bottos.

<sup>10</sup> See for examples Eunice Adorno's photography collection *Las mujeres flores*, Carlos Reygadas' film *Silent Light* or Gustavo Loza and Álvaro Curiel's television series *Los héroes del norte*.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Jonathan Foltz's "Betraying Oneself" or Neils Niessen's "Miraculous Realism."

explores the ways media portrays Mennonites and suggests that Mennonites can produce media that advances a religious mission. Weaver-Zercher and Carpenter, then, read representations of culturally distinct groups to draw conclusions about those groups and about dominant culture. I differ from their work not only because I examine Low German Mennonites in Bolivia, but also because I maintain that reading reports of the Ghost Rapes that occurred among Low German Mennonites—as reported by Bolivian news—can only provide us with perceptions about the Ghost Rapes. They cannot tell us what happened, nor can such a reading account for the relationship between the Mennonites and Bolivian society. It can only point us in that direction.

#### *Making a Plurinational State*

This society, now a plurinational one, came into being out of a series of indigenous protests for autonomy and existing agreements among indigenous nations about governance and the desire to control their own valuable natural resources (Tapia 2). According to Bautista, these protests occurred because the government exerted a colonial type of control over indigenous people (8). Indeed, after Bolivia underwent a nationalist revolution in 1952, the revolutionary government under Paz Estenssoro redefined the country as a mixed-race nation, ignoring or repressing most indigenous people and recasting them as peasants. Revolutionary discourse and government only recognized the two largest indigenous nations in Bolivia—Aymara and Quechua—and this was only in order to assimilate them. According to Bautista, then, the revolution was a colonially minded movement based on *des-indianización*, in other words, based on erasing indigenous people (16). President Evo Morales sought to redress this past and the constitution enacted under his tenure conceives of the state in a different way. It employs a mixture of democratic and traditional decision-making processes and allows for judicial pluralism. In addition, it uses various methods for creating a just society and allow for solving crimes in multiple ways. Thus, the plurinational state represents a significant change from the previous regime on rhetorical and practical levels. Bautista optimistically proclaims that in this era, Bolivian people will become autonomous subjects by joining the plurinational project, and that they will exercise “una subjetividad ya no sólo libre sino liberadora” (Bautista 23).

Many scholars, however, are critical of this project, as well as of Bolivia’s revolutionary past. Tapia explains that the plurinational state ignores indigenous

demands for complete autonomy (10). That is, the new constitution is only a concession to some of their demands. He adds that this conception of the Bolivian State does not provide space for collective decision-making between indigenous nations nor does it establish an inter-cultural government (22). Its political processes, in other words, continue to mimic the colonizer and the colonizing revolution. Fontana offers further cautions. She observes that many of these changes are rooted in president Morales' charisma and, although they affirmed by a majority in a referendum, they do not represent the outcome of any political process (195). We might add that Morales uses his indigenous background to lend credibility to plurinationalism, even when this credibility is not entirely warranted. This state, then, offers limited autonomies to indigenous people in a way that is convenient for the Bolivian government and for its head.

Bolivian feminists help us understand other limits of this new state by emphasizing the position of women in it. The constitution duly promotes equality, such as the right for men and women to live without violence; it also mandates equal representation of men and women in parliament, declares nondiscrimination in the workplace and claims to protect reproductive rights ("República de Bolivia," 15-II; 26-I; 48-VI; 66). Karin Monasterios, a sociologist and advisor to the Morales government with regard to gender, critiques the quotas for women in parliament, but she does not offer concrete solutions for ongoing inequality. She contends that dismantling internalized colonialism would eradicate these problems, because the patriarchal subordination of women is only a byproduct of ethnic subordination (Monasterios). For her, then, it appears that the constitution need only be fully implemented and the rights granted to indigenous people would mean that the situation of women would improve. María Galindo, who leads a radical feminist collective called "Mujeres creando," disagrees. She explains that the plurinational state is inherently patriarchal and that Morales is the ultimate caudillo or patriarch. Galindo thus posits that Morales is the head of a paternalistic state, and as such seeks to protect its least powerful members instead of engaging with them (Green and Lackowski). Violence against women, in spite of its illegality, remains extensive.<sup>12</sup> Galindo also points out that most women's reproductive rights are violated on a regular basis because abortion is only legal in the most extreme cases. Wealthy

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<sup>12</sup> The World Health Organization specifies that the rate of intimate partner violence is around thirty-seven per cent in the Americas, excluding the United States and Canada, where it is estimated to be thirty-two per cent.

women, of course, can pay for elective and illegal abortions, and poor and indigenous women cannot. This may be because, as Galindo adds, women have been absent from the Bolivian social movements that have effected significant legislative change (Green and Lackowski). Regional legal autonomy and women's rights, both entrenched in the constitution, are thus impossible. The plurinational state, as Fontana and Galindo remind us, is protectionist and patriarchal in practice.

There are no Low German Mennonite women who can help us understand how they are affected by the Bolivian constitution. In fact, the only research on Low German Mennonite women has been conducted by social scientists in Canada. Their studies, in the realm of health and education, establish that talking about sexuality is taboo in the conservative Low German Mennonite community (Kulig, Babcock, Wall and Hill 331). Their articles encourage Canadian public health and public education to adapt to meet the needs of the Low German Mennonites (Kulig, Wall, Hill and Babcock 421). Their work does not, however, help us understand the situation of Low German Mennonite women in Bolivia. Women there are less likely to speak to journalists, probably because throughout the Americas, Low German Mennonite women are less likely to speak the language of the dominant culture, be it English, Spanish or Portuguese. Neither these researchers, nor the feminist theorists who study rape, whose work I will discuss below, can replace the voices of the women we do not hear in the representations of the Ghost Rapes.

*The Bolivian State, Bolivian News and Low German Mennonites*

Beyond this striking absence, representations of the Ghost Rapes confirm the existence of patriarchal and protectionist structures in plurinational Bolivia. The coverage of the events is the result of men reporting the crimes to the Bolivian authorities because they were so serious. The Ghost Rapes outraged Bolivian television news anchors that broadcasted short updates on the case on the commercial television network *Unitel*, which is based in Santa Cruz. The Ghost Rapes are also part of an episode, "Menonitas, tradiciones violadas" in the series "Mundos Extremos," from Teledocumentales, the Discovery Channel's Latin American branch. This documentary echoes television news, but since it comes from the United States, is less significant in my analysis. Bolivians also responded to the documentary and to the news clips as they were uploaded online. These responses began taking place at the same time as Bolivians were presented with information about the plurinational constitution and as they were experiencing its implications in the legal, educational

and parliamentary spheres. The Ghost Rapes were also featured in the Bolivian newspaper *El Día* and in stories filed by Bolivian-based journalists for EFE, a Spanish international news service.<sup>13</sup>

The broadcasts and articles about the rapists' arrest and conviction appear shocked that such crimes could be committed by members of what they considered to be the pastoral Mennonite community. Like good journalistic work, they also seek to report the truth about the events. The shock factor follows what scholars of communication Lisa M. Cuklanz and Sunjata Moorti establish in *Local Violence, Global Media: Feminist Analyses of Gendered Representations*. This collection, largely by US-based academics, brings together analyses of rape and violence primarily enacted by men against women and transgender people in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe. In their introduction, Cuklanz and Moorti argue that the representations of rape in the media often register surprise, in part because these representations illustrate broad social anxieties (2). The Bolivian media coverage of the Ghost Rapes also conforms to Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda T. Silver's observations that stories of rape uncover a single truth about events rather than offering up multiple possibilities. These stories tend to exclude women's voices since they are often told from a male perspective (Higgins and Silver 1-2). The single truth, according to male Bolivian narrators and framed by female anchors, suggests that it is good that the Bolivian judicial system protects the vulnerable Mennonites.

The *Unitel* broadcasts from the time of the rapists' arrest imply that a centralized Bolivian legal system would bring about justice. A clip from these reports—"Menonitas enviados a la cárcel, acusados de violar a 60 mujeres"—was broadcast on June 24, 2009. It was anonymously uploaded to a YouTube Channel called "Videos de Bolivia" three days later and has been viewed over 115,000 times. A second *Unitel* report, "Desde el lugar de los hechos, sobre el caso de las 60 mujeres menonitas violadas," was broadcast on June 26, 2009 and uploaded a day later to the same YouTube channel on the same day as the previous news clip. It has been viewed 36,000 times. The clips begin with a brief image of a female news anchor. From their clothing, jewelry and make-up, we can assume that both young-looking, white women are relatively wealthy and based in Santa Cruz, like the *Unitel* network. The aesthetically pleasing framing these anchors provide does not account for the

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<sup>13</sup> These events also struck a nerve worldwide and were covered by Jean Friedman-Rudovsky for *Time* magazine and later were the basis of a documentary she made in conjunction with Noah Friedman-Rudovsky for *Vice*. This documentary, in turn, was recognized by Tracey Morrissey on the popular feminist blog *Jezebel*.

difference between their social location and that of the Low German Mennonite women and girls they describe. This absence may hint at a doubly protectionist attitude towards them, as they are to be further sheltered from society and more protected than their husbands and fathers. In the case of the reports on the Ghost Rapes, it is as if the media seeks to shelter the women from the violence committed against them by implying that the violence primarily affects the men in their community.

The first clip, “Menonitas enviados a la cárcel,” shows a series of images as the anchor narrates the attacks and the arrest. The first images are of the accused men in a jail cell turning around to face the camera, which is shown three times in the span of a minute and a half. The clip then pans over the mug shots of each of the accused men and moves around while filming what appear to be stock photographs of Low German Mennonite women wearing kerchiefs, a technique that almost convinces us that the women are moving around. The clip dehumanizes the women by not employing techniques such as filming and completely ignoring the girls. It further marginalizes the women as it explains that they come from an inbred community that rarely relates to the outside world. The women, the anchor continues, are satisfied with how the rapes were resolved after the men’s arrest. This satisfaction seems unlikely because the men had not yet been sentenced. This could reflect the fact that the Bolivian justice system assumes guilt until proven innocent, but a more likely scenario is Cuklanz and Moorti’s assertion that representations of rape provoke and express social anxiety. Thus, this clip presents a single version of events without talking to the women or even filming them. They are purportedly voiceless victims satisfied with an outcome that *Unitel’s* audience may favor.

The second clip also caters to the needs of its viewers. The anchor introduces the Ghost Rapes as “terribles historias” and then the screen shifts to pastoral imagery of people driving horses and buggies with the subtitle “El lugar del drama” (“Desde el lugar”). This clip interviews Low German Mennonite men who state that they are angry that they could not confront what the image the clip presents of the men as aggressors. Throughout these interviews, the clip makes plain that the Low German Mennonites’ pacifist religious beliefs make them powerless, and thus implies that they are more dependent on Bolivian law and order. “Desde el lugar de los hechos” presents these men in such a way that they conform to Marta Peixoto’s observations regarding violence against women in Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector’s narrative fiction. Like Lispector’s fiction, the clip gives voice to the female victims’ experience

through expressions of male aggression (Peixoto 187). In this case, *Unitel* emphasizes the impotence the men must feel since they cannot be as violent as they, of course, would like to be.<sup>14</sup>

The documentary “Menonitas, tradiciones violadas” also focuses on the Manitoba colony’s pastoral environment by showing many images of fields and of buggies. The way the documentary juxtaposes this imagery with its narration of the events emphasizes its position, which is that the community was marred by the rapes and needed outside help. The documentary’s male narrator, as Higgins and Silver might have predicted, searches for a single truth. This journalist interviews some of the men in the Manitoba colony and confirms that the men had suffered due to the rapes of their wives and daughters. “Menonitas, tradiciones violadas” concludes with the image of a man shooting a gun as it describes the Mennonites’ exceptionally hard work and rigid rules. This image insinuates that for the documentary, the Low German Mennonites were unprepared to deal with these crimes and that they would have preferred to kill the rapists. The documentary and news clips, then, subtly advance the perception that the legal system protects the Low German Mennonites because their curious religious beliefs make them unable to protect themselves. From their perspective, then, it may be that the only way for the Low German Mennonites to maintain their religious mandate of separation from the world and avoiding armed violence is by accepting government intervention in the legal arena.

Online comments emphasize film and media critic Tanya Horeck’s assertion that representations of rape illuminate questions of belonging. She posits that representations of rape “are essential to the way in which the body politic is imagined, serving as a site for cultural conflict and the embodiment of public concerns” (vii). The comments echo the implications of the documentary and television news and suggest that that Low German Mennonites belong in Bolivia. Instead of advocating some kind of paternalistic protection, however, these comments suggest that the Low German Mennonites should make changes to their community to better participate and integrate into Bolivia. The commenters, like the clips, emphasize male aggression and ignore the voices of women. “Erick Ray,” a commenter on “Desde el lugar de los

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<sup>14</sup> Men in another colony in Bolivia reportedly lynched an accused rapist (J. Friedman-Rudovsky “A Verdict”). Huber adds: “Franz Klassen of the nearby Tres Cruces Colony was suspected of rape and was tied to a tree by his arms with his feet dangling for nine hours. Klassen, who had a history of alcohol and spousal abuse and had been punished before, could not move his arms after being released, and died a few days later” (“8 Convicted”).

hechos,” like the clip itself, conforms to what Peixoto describes as the tendency for male aggressors to give voice to a female experience. He states:

malditos imbecil los menonitas nisiquiera los ven a la cara  
 abusan de ellas ellos no pueden matar a nadie  
 pero mucha gente si y ojala los maten! [sic] (“Desde el lugar”)<sup>15</sup>

Ray is correct, in that we do not see the women’s faces in this clip, and that when the camera shifts to the accused men, they also avoid eye contact. He observes that the men should be able to enact vigilante-style justice, and implies that they are lesser men when they cannot. Ray’s comments imply that the Low German Mennonites are included in a Bolivian body politic as long as others can act as vigilantes on their behalf. Other observations emphasize the desire that Low German Mennonites be included in a unified Bolivia. Cidar Florencio López Paredes, from Santa Cruz, comments on the documentary, “como en toda sociedad, las leyes, las normas, son para todos los que habitan un estado, en nuestro caso, que hace el estado, ante estos hechos, fanatismo, intolerancia, etc. que algunos a nombre de la biblia hacen aberraciones sociales” (“Menonitas, tradiciones”). He believes that the law is for everyone and he worries that it is not being implemented in such a way that it can deal with the extremely religious Low German Mennonites. This counters what a commenter called “wsalinas1” celebrated five years earlier. “Wsalinas1” noted that the Mennonites were becoming less separate: “ULTIMA NOVEDAD: REVOLUCION MENONITA, ALGUNOS, COMIENZAN A ESTUDIAR E INTEGRARSE” (“Menonitas enviados”). These comments support the idea that the government should protect the Mennonites because unless they integrate, which only some are willing to do, they will remain vulnerable. A plurinational state that encourages various forms of dispute resolution seems irrelevant for these commenters.

News articles that represent the Ghost Rapes are similarly shocked that such violence could occur in the Low German Mennonite community. Like the television news clips and online comments, these reports represent male aggression and offer to provide that aggression on the Mennonite men’s behalf. In some sense, the way they describe the Ghost Rapes implies that Low German Mennonites should be integrated into Bolivian life in order to be better protected by a legal system I would call protectionist. In this vein, in July 2009, one month after the *Unitel* broadcasts, Bolivian based journalist Lorena Arroyo reported on the Ghost Rapes for EFE in a

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<sup>15</sup> I have placed a single [sic] to denote various grammatical errors.

widely reproduced article. After the sentencing, Lubomir Endara Sánchez's article "Dictan 25 años de cárcel a menonitas violadores" appeared in the Bolivian daily *El Día*. These representative articles discuss the Low German Mennonite male victims and male aggressors, thus confirming the suggestion that the husbands and fathers are the primary victims and that they are powerless. Arroyo's article, for example, interviews a Low German Mennonite man called Jonh Boldt who states that the perpetrators: "No respetaron ni a los ministros—los líderes religiosos de la comunidad—, también violaron a sus hijas" (Arroyo). This alludes to the hierarchical nature of Low German Mennonite society and furthers the idea that the men were wronged when their female family members were raped. Endara Sánchez's article and others that report on the trial and sentencing offer such a protector, the Bolivian defense attorney Oswaldo Rivera Estrada, who is quoted as satisfied with how justice was carried out for the colony. The way these articles represent rape suggests that justice comes through violence, or, if that is not an available option, through legal action brought about by figures like Rivera Estrada.

### *Conclusion*

The articles, comments and news clips represent the Ghost Rapes in such a way that we understand that Low German Mennonite men are powerless against the crimes committed against *them*. They suggest that the men would naturally be angry as they are the crimes' implied and primary victims. The news reports ignore and dehumanize the women and practically forget about the girls. Since violence is not an option for these violated men, these articles advance the Bolivian justice system as a possible and positive solution for them. These male victims are offered space in Bolivia's body politic as long as they accept that it is a patriarchal, hierarchical and, as Fontana contends, a caudillo-based system. The male leader, Morales, protects his vassals, who would include the Low German Mennonites, when they work on his behalf. This structure is a far cry from the plurinational ideal Bautista expounds upon, and which, in its ideal form, Tapia would also appear to support. These representations do not outline or directly counter the plurinational state. They only highlight what Fontana and Galindo describe as a structure around a charismatic leader whose rhetoric and constitution differ greatly from this representation of life in Bolivia. The media reaffirms the Bolivian state, or at least its judicial arm when it protects its people. They thus advocate protectionism based on the patriarchal structures that are also embedded in the plurinational state. We could conclude that

only when the state does not meet people on their own terms is it perceived to mete out justice.

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