



INTRODUCTION

Indian Problems, Indian Solutions

On March 29, 1899, in the midst of a civil war pitting the Liberals against the Conservatives, the Liberal Party supporter and Aymara indigenous community leader of Peñas, Juan Lero, received a letter from a neighboring Indian community leader. Its author confirmed support for the Liberal Party and a willingness to coordinate military efforts among Bolivia's highland indigenous communities on behalf of the Liberal leader, General José M. Pando. "I write to inform you," stated José Maria Galligo, the community leader of Guayllani, "that here we are ready to take up the railroad tracks and fight against Alonso [president of Bolivia and head of the Conservative Party]. Please tell us on which day we should mobilize. We await your reply."¹ This correspondence illustrates the network of indigenous community leaders that developed in the second half of the nineteenth century in Bolivia. These leaders played key roles in defending their community lands, in petitioning the government, in brokering political alliances, and in testifying in courtrooms. Cesiliano Gallego, the Aymara community authority of Merque Aimaya, assured Juan Lero in April 1899, just days before the end of the civil war, that the people of Merque Aimaya would also lend their support to the Liberals' final push for victory. "I got your letter . . . in which you told us to prepare our community," he wrote. "We are ready for tomorrow; wait for us and we will bring honor to Pando's forces."²



FIGURE 1. Mapa de Bolivia por Luis García Meza, division político-administrativa de la república, Ministerio de Colonización y agricultura 1908. Courtesy of the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress

These letters between Aymara leaders, or *caciques apoderados*, illustrate that the Aymaras' support for the Liberal Party was both widespread and coordinated through indigenous leadership; it permeated many communities in highland Bolivia in the corridor between La Paz and Oruro extending south toward Peñas and Challapata and into the Department of Potosí.

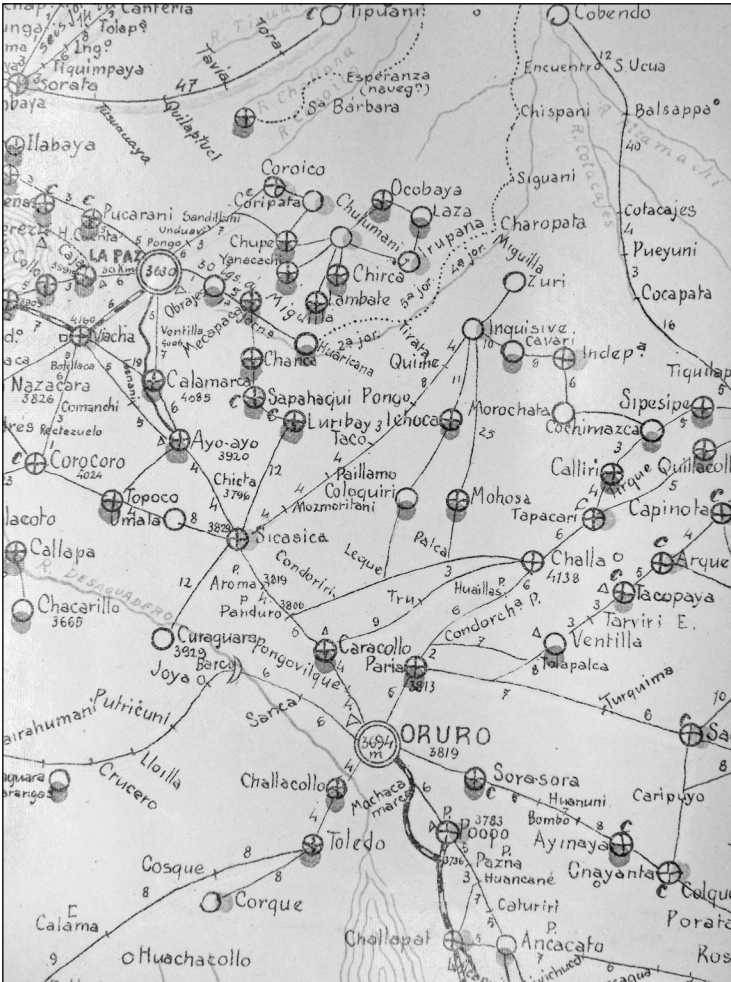


FIGURE 2. Mapa General de la República de Bolivia por Luis Garcia Meza, 1909. Courtesy of the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress

Aymara support for the Liberal cause is explicit in the letters just cited and remained evident throughout the last days of the civil war, which ended in April 1899. Esteban Ari, an Aymara supporter of the Liberal Party, referred to “the reign of justice” that he believed the party’s rise to power would bring.³ Ari’s comment indicates that real hope for political change existed among Liberal Party supporters living in small communities throughout the

highlands, and they continued to reiterate their support for the party after the civil war.

The shift of power from the traditional elite of Bolivia, who owed much of their fortune to the rich silver mines of Potosí and to the fertile valley lands, to the highland-based Liberal Party in La Paz was especially significant in terms of redefining regional clout and political power in favor of western highland Bolivia. The Conservative Party concentrated political authority in the capital seat of Sucre; the Liberal Party fought for a federal model for the Bolivian nation. Capitalizing on the emerging tin boom in western highland Bolivia that would dominate the nation's economy in the early twentieth century, the Liberal Party headquartered in La Paz, a city perched at approximately 12,000 feet whose proximity to the tin mines made it home to a new "tin baron" elite. As General Pando and his faction attempted to consolidate both economic and political power in highland Bolivia, they reached out to the dominant regional population, the Aymara indigenous group, for military support. Rather than portray the Aymara-Creole alliance in support of the Liberal Party as a union of convenience, I suggest that this working partnership profoundly shaped the nation-building project in early twentieth-century Bolivia.

Understanding the Reverberations of the Civil War of 1899 and Early Twentieth-Century Nation Building

From December 1898 until April 1899, highland Bolivia was the site of a civil war that ultimately led to the rise of the Liberal Party and the transfer of the majority of the government from Sucre to La Paz. The highland Aymara indigenous group played a key role in this transformative process through the alliance between Aymara communities and Creole politicians. Rather than obtain their leadership position through lineage claims, the indigenous leaders acquired influence through their experience and their communities' trust in them.⁴ These caciques apoderados fought attempts to privatize communal land as a result of the Disentailment Law of 1874, which proclaimed the division of collectively owned lands; they also represented community interests in court and filed numerous petitions on behalf of their constituencies. By the time the civil war broke out, these indigenous community leaders had at least one decade of experience in petitioning subprefects for land and labor rights; working in Bolivia's archives in search of land titles; and negotiating with national politicians, as is illustrated by the relationship between Pando and the principal cacique apoderado, Pablo Zárate Willka, which existed prior to the onset of the civil war.⁵ Opposed to the Conserva-

tive Party regime's implementation of the disentailment law, and attracted by the benefits of a federalist system, the Aymara population sought a political alternative to the centralized government system supported by Conservative Party politicians, who ordered surveys of communal lands in preparation for their privatization in the 1880s.⁶

Although Liberal Party politicians initially justified the war as a means to secure a federal system of governance that would grant greater regional autonomy, this original basis of contention became overshadowed by the dominant factors of race and region. The towering peaks of the Andes Mountains, which characterize western Bolivia, offered an inhospitable environment that was often perceived by turn-of-the-century intellectuals as an impediment to attracting desirable foreign immigrants, since they could not withstand the region's cold climate and low oxygen levels. Intellectuals also identified the predominant Indian population in the highlands, the Aymaras, as a contributing factor in creating the "uncivilized" environment of La Paz.⁷ During the war, newspaper articles decrying the savagery and primitiveness of the Aymara population created an image of La Paz and the highlands as a dangerous frontier zone where "savagery and civilization" repeatedly bumped against each other because of their uncomfortable proximity. Documents authored by the cacique apoderado Zárate Willka indicate that he attempted to ameliorate racial tensions shortly before the end of the civil war. He envisioned the "new Bolivia" that would emerge under Liberal Party tutelage as a more racially tolerant and inclusive nation. In "Proclamation of Caracollo," a circular dated March 28, 1899, that he sent throughout the highlands, he spoke of the "regeneration of Bolivia" that was taking place through the transformative experience of the civil war, in which indigenous people and Creoles were fighting together to defend their political ideals. Zárate Willka reminded Bolivians that the Indians should respect the Creoles and the Creoles in turn should respect the Indians: "We are all of the same blood, we are all children of Bolivia, and we should love each other like brothers."⁸

Zárate Willka's words would eventually ring hollow in the ears of the new Liberal Party politicians, who were eager to distance their victory from the Aymaras' wartime support. After the war had ended, these politicians would fight the Aymaras in courtrooms, criminalizing their participation in the Civil War of 1899. The new regime opened a series of legal hearings designed to investigate whether the Aymara population had even supported the Liberal Party during the military campaign. Prosecutors in these proceedings, such as the Peñas and Mohoza trials, branded the Aymaras' participa-

tion in the war as a race war against the Creole landowning population, and the fleeting alliance between Aymara communities and the Creole politicians quickly dissolved. The Aymara leaders Zárate Willka and Juan Lero, who had played pivotal roles during the civil war, insisted that they had not authored any race war and that they had mobilized on behalf of the Liberal Party.⁹ Despite these claims, legal authorities found the Aymaras in question guilty of heinous and violent acts, which served to distance and marginalize the Aymara population and to identify them as enemies of the nation. The Civil War of 1899 thus ultimately led to a deepening of racial divisions between the Indian and Creole populations.¹⁰

The Aymaras' participation in the Civil War of 1899 is therefore often remembered as an Aymara-led race war or, more recently, as the formation of an autonomous Aymara movement, which reveals that the racial divides exacerbated during the nation-building era are still not resolved. Some historians concede that the Aymaras and the Creoles initially allied themselves, but few are willing to claim that this alliance continued toward the end of the war or following it, stating instead that the Liberal Party's victory, pronounced on April 10, had not met the expectations of their Aymara allies.¹¹ According to this interpretation, the Aymaras continued to fight for their own political agenda and against the Creole landowning class and the Liberal Party.¹² Recent revisionist narratives written since the 1970s have emphasized the Civil War of 1899 as the foundation of Aymara ethnic movements in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹³ The "Zárate Willka Rebellion of 1899" plays a prominent role in a new historical consciousness that underscores the neocolonial conditions prevalent in Bolivian society and seeks to decolonize historical narratives that marginalize indigenous peoples and their pasts. Aymara organizations today often define their political struggles as the culmination of the "Zárate Willka Rebellion" and articulate their demands for Indian autonomy as a continuation of the caciques apoderados' demands in 1899.

A separate line of scholarship recognizes that although the judges criminalized the former Aymara allies who participated in the civil war, the modernizing potential of the highland indigenous population remained important to Liberal politicians and intellectuals.¹⁴ These studies suggest that the rejection of mestizos, or mixed-race populations, common among intellectuals at the turn of the century meant that Indians were a more "redeemable" population than the mestizos.¹⁵ The indigenous population could be "improved" and "civilized," so that it might constitute the backbone of the labor market for the new modernizing highland capital city and serve

as a regional symbol for this era's highland-based nation-building project.¹⁶ These accounts, however, fail to explain how the Aymaras, accused of race war and branded as savage in the legal proceedings that had criminalized their participation in the civil war, could be quickly transformed in the national imagination as crucial to the nation-building project. Moreover, traditional historical narratives and revisionist Katarista historiography have both reproduced stark divisions between Creoles and Aymaras, although for very different reasons. Both versions obscure the alliance between Aymaras and Creoles in support of the Liberal Party in 1899, and neither investigates the important possibility of a working relationship between the Aymara and the Creole populations at this time. Paradoxically, the historical statements used as evidence that the events of 1899 gave rise to an autonomous Aymara movement led by the caciques apoderados or that they constituted an Aymara-led race war against the Creole elite generally come from Ramiro Condarco Morales's book *Zárate, el "temible" Willka: Historia de la rebelión indígena de 1899*. Condarco Morales's detailed study, which recounts the Civil War of 1899 and, in particular, the alliance between Aymaras and Creoles, bases the majority of its conclusions on testimony presented by the prosecution in the Peñas trial. In using Condarco Morales's book as a primary source to decolonize the historical narrative of 1899, the revisionist Katarista historians are inadvertently relying on the testimony of the prosecution and its witnesses, reproducing the voice of the agents of oppression rather than the words of the Aymara defendants.

My study revisits the multiple ways the Aymara population participated in national politics in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bolivia and, in doing so, shaped the nation-building project. The analysis extends beyond the civil war, bridging the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and connecting the Aymaras' participation in that conflict to the liberal nation-building project of the early twentieth century. The Creole politicians in the Liberal Party did distance themselves brusquely from the Aymaras after the war, but this does not necessarily negate the earlier political alliance that Aymaras and Creoles forged in the name of liberalism. In addition, the reality that highland Bolivia was home to a predominantly Aymara population shaped the national discourse under the tutelage of the Liberal Party; it sought to justify moving the capital to the highland region, which was characterized by low oxygen levels and a high concentration of Indians. The Aymaras' role in the civil war may have ended tragically in the courtroom, but this does not imply that their desire to engage the nation did as well. The Aymaras' continual engagement with liberal Creoles' national discourse and

constructions of Indian identity becomes evident first through their alliance with the Liberal Party and then through the Aymara elite's construction of a "preferred" Indian identity that resonated with the liberal project. Using the previously neglected testimony of the Aymara defendants during the Peñas trial, this study demonstrates that cross-cultural, multiracial collaboration between indigenous communities and national political parties are as much a part of the Aymara past as are autonomous Indian movements.

In discussing the Aymara participation in the Civil War of 1899, I refer to the two groups that constituted the alliance at issue as "Aymara" and "Creole" so as to separate constructions of race and racism from associations with political movements. Former studies on the civil war have employed the words *Aymara* and *liberal* to discuss the tensions within this alliance. While these studies focus mainly on the question of an Aymara-led race war, the Aymara/liberal binary implies that the conflicts were both racial and political; accusations of race war seemed to preclude a full consideration of the Aymaras' views on liberalism and on political change. Employing the terms *Aymara* and *Creole* permits an analysis that posits both Indian and Creole supporters of the Liberal Party; some shortcomings, however, remain. As will become evident, political and social divisions did not always align neatly with constructions of racial difference. Manuel Rigoberto Paredes, a man of Aymara origin who spoke Aymara and Spanish, was also a politician, an author, and an active member of the Liberal Party; he illustrates the rise of urban Indian intellectuals in La Paz during the early twentieth century. The fact that Aymara individuals acted both as complainants and defendants in the Peñas trial complicates any dismissal of the Aymaras' support from consideration as adherents of the Liberal Party. The terms *Aymara* and *Creole*, then, cannot fully capture relations between race and politics in early twentieth-century Bolivia, but this terminology does offer a corrective to the racial and political binaries implied in the earlier usage.

The Civil War of 1899 and its aftermath highlight key tensions in Bolivia's nation-building process, which was characterized by paradoxical efforts among Creole intellectuals to construct an ideal "Indian" identity as emblematic of the nation and the national past yet simultaneously to marginalize the actual Aymara population. Intellectuals took up the themes of civilization versus barbarism to glorify the past Inca civilization, which they contrasted to what they perceived to be the lamentable state of the Aymara population in the early twentieth century. The Incas had been the conquerors and the nation builders; the Aymaras had been subsumed within the Inca Empire and had never developed such a sophisticated civilization. Constructions of

a “preferred” Inca identity, however, did not remain solely in the hands of the Creole intellectuals. Instead, the early twentieth-century Aymara elite in the highland town of Caracollo adopted an Inca identity following the civil war to avoid the stigma of being Aymara, which was seen as an unacceptable form of Indianness, and to seek national inclusion in ways that an assertion of Aymara identity would have prohibited. In this case, Creole intellectuals, pressed to address the “Indian question” because of the Aymara participation as the allies of the Liberal Party in the civil war, opened up spaces for national belonging through their rhetorical inclusion of a socially constructed Inca identity. These spaces were filled by the highland Aymara elite, who adopted an Inca past into their genealogy. For example, in the predominantly Aymara town of Caracollo, which served as a strategic site of support for the Liberal Party during the war, the local Aymara elite performed theatrical representations of the Inca Empire, which resonated with the Liberals’ promotion of the nation’s Inca past in the early twentieth century. In the play, the Aymara past (or the Uru or Guaraní past, for that matter) prior to Inca rule is rendered invisible.

Liberalism, Race, and Nation Building in Bolivia

Framing the Civil War of 1899 as an instance of Aymara support for the Liberal Party and understanding the subsequent early twentieth-century constructions and performances of Inca identity as a discourse of national belonging invites new lines of inquiry and understanding regarding constructions of race, Indian identity, and nation building. Scholars have previously approached the field of race and modernity in Indo-America by analyzing the categories of Indian, Creole, and mestizo identities. The first contribution of my study is a deeper investigation of the category of “Indian,” which allows us to see differences crucial to understanding the multiple spaces “Indians” held both discursively and sociopolitically in Bolivia. From the point of view of nation building, not all Indians were created equal. As Rebecca Earle, David Brading, and Alexander Dawson have demonstrated, prequest empires might be refigured as illustrious precursors of postindependence nations even as present-day indigenous majorities were marginalized, subordinated, and denied (either *de jure* or *de facto*) the benefits of citizenship.¹⁷ In Bolivia this panorama was all the more complex because the indigenous majority there comprised multiple and nested communities, reflecting linguistic, regional, and cultural divides shaped and reshaped over many centuries of political and economic transformations. Historically, the Aymara population (also referred to as Kolla) was organized into separate

kingdoms that asserted dominance over other ethnic groups in highland Bolivia until the Incas conquered them in the late 1400s, subsuming them within the Inca Empire. Colonial resettlement programs and rotational labor drafts to the mines were only the beginnings of larger patterns that blurred associations between region and ethnic identity on a quotidian basis.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Bolivia's political discourse did not strive to respond to these complexities of ethnic identity but rather intended to reorder the physical and political landscape through the racialization of the highland region where the rising Liberal Party was headquartered. Within the Conservative Party, some Creole intellectuals, such as Mariano Baptista, claimed that the Aymara forces mobilizing throughout their mountain environment reflected the impassivity of the Andes peaks in their very nature; the Aymaras were hard, severe, unchanging, and resistant to progress.¹⁸ The carefully crafted Inca image, in contrast, described as whiter and more "civilized," was meant to imbue Bolivia with a promising and emblematic past that defined national identity and cast Bolivia's majority indigenous population in a progressive light. Since the historical context negated any outright glorification of the Aymara, the Inca became the axis within a liberal discourse designed to address questions of progress and race. Inca leaders, such as the last sovereign ruler of the empire, and sacred archeological sites became integral parts of liberal intellectuals' visions of national identity, modernization, and progress, representing a "civilized" Indian past that contrasted with the "barbarous" Indian present.

The liberal Creoles' discourse in the postwar era marked an important shift in the national narrative; for the first time, writers aligned with the Liberal Party cautiously included the Aymara population within the national historical narrative and cast them in a progressive light. The ancient Aymaras received recognition as the ancestors of the glorified Incas. In this context, the "Bolivian Inca" had an important ancestor, the Aymara. These intellectuals' careful construction of the Inca image disparaged the contemporary Aymara population but did recognize the ancient Aymaras as the relatives and predecessors of the Incas. In establishing this evolutionary connection between the Aymaras and the Incas, such intellectuals maintained preferred constructions of Indian identity at the core of Bolivian national discourse. Rather than adopt a discourse of *mestizaje*, as happened in Mexico, or attempt to marginalize the issue of race, as occurred in Cuba with the idea of racelessness, discourses of national unity and racial improvement in Bolivia tended to remain within the broad category of Indianness itself.¹⁹ These liberal intellectuals may have deemed the Indian race a problem, but the spectrum

within the category of “Indian” served as an indicator for the broader civilizing process designed for Indian improvement from “Aymara” to “Inca.” Although the majority of the indigenous population was deemed unfit to receive the benefits of citizenship in the early twentieth century, constructions of Indian identity remained at the heart of national discourse in Bolivia.

Second, my work moves beyond Creole imaginings of nation to consider the ways in which indigenous people engaged the intellectuals’ appropriation and promotion of an Indian past. Using theater as one of my historical sources, I investigate how the local Aymara elite in the historically Aymara highland town of Caracollo refashioned and adopted an “Inca” identity in the wake of the civil war. During the tin boom of the early twentieth century, theater constituted a hallmark of modernization, rivaling the importance of the Roman Catholic Church during the colonial era in its capacity to moralize, civilize, and instill patriotism in its audience. This local cultural manifestation serves as a source to inform our understanding of larger national political processes. Capitalizing on the intellectuals’ promotion of the Inca as the “acceptable” Indian identity, the Aymara elite constructed and performed an Inca identity by acting in the drama of the conquest and representing the confrontation between Incas and Spaniards.

The construction and performance of the Inca image and past served as a discursive means through which the local elite and national intellectuals remapped the boundaries of national belonging and of Indianness, identity, and race within the emerging Bolivian nation. Previous scholarship, such as that of Nathan Wachtel and Raquel Chang-Rodríguez, has associated local community-level promotions of Inca imagery or theatrical performances of the Inca past with indigenous rebellion or with a collective desire to return to an Indian past.²⁰ In contrast, the Caracollo Inca play served as a means to negotiate the Indian presence within the liberal political project. Theatrical performances of the Inca past in Caracollo serve as an intriguing source for the study of local constructions of an Inca identity in early twentieth-century Bolivia. My analysis of the play, which originated shortly after the Civil War of 1899, is informed by scripts, masks, costumes, the historical context, and the oral histories of contemporary Inca actors, which all underscore the centrality of constructing an Inca past in the historical narrative of Caracollo. In highlighting the fall of the Inca Empire and the arrival of the Spaniards, the Aymara actors render the Incas as the only Indian protagonists in the play. The exclusion of their own Aymara past prior to contact with Europeans, coupled with the promotion of the Incas as the only Indian protagonists in the play, reflects a turn-of-the-century trend that directed the nation’s at-

tention away from a non-Inca indigenous history.²¹ Again, the local Aymara elite adopted an Inca identity after the war to avoid the stigma of being “Aymara”—an unacceptable form of Indianness—and to mobilize for national inclusion. Appropriating and promoting an Inca past allowed the local Aymara elite to consolidate power on the local level as well as to claim a space for themselves as “progressive Indians” within the nation in ways that an assertion of an Aymara identity would have prohibited.

Third, this study explores what it means to construct and adopt an Inca identity in a geographic area that was located on the fringe of the Inca Empire and that has historically been home to a large Aymara population. By considering what “acting Inca” has meant in Caracollo, situated at the Inca periphery both historically and discursively, we can better understand the fluidity of significance in adopting an Inca identity as well as its resonance across time and space throughout the Andes. The racialization of the Bolivian highlands as a predominantly Indian region was evident in the statistics of the 1900 census, whose directors, Manuel Ballivián and Luis Crespo, estimated the national population to be 51 percent Indian. The valley regions of Cochabamba and Chuquisaca (where Sucre is located) appeared to have Indian populations well below the national average, with respectively 23 percent and 39 percent of their populations defined as Indians. The highland departments of La Paz and Oruro were well above the national average, with majority Indian populations of 76 percent and 68 percent, respectively.²² Not only did the valleys have lower Indian populations, but they were also historically associated with the Quechuas, the descendants of the “gentler and more civilized Incas,” who supposedly, as the census directors state, “further developed the Aymara civilization, making it great.”²³ In legitimizing their rule and their region, Liberal politicians thus faced challenges both quantitative, in terms of the region’s large Indian population, and qualitative, in terms of the historical significance associated with the more “primitive” Aymaras. The Inca image and past were key to Liberal Party politicians’ and intellectuals’ transformation of western Bolivia into a beacon of national progress.

This study offers a reassessment of Bolivian intellectuals’ early twentieth-century designs of nation, which were shaped in part by the actions and political initiatives of the very Indians the intellectuals sought to categorize, define, and contain. I attempt to show that conversations regarding the “regenerative potential” of the Indian race took place through constructions of different Indian identities. The highland Aymara elite opted to promote an Inca past via theatrical presentations and narrations beginning with the

historical watershed marked by the might and fall of the Inca Empire, silencing the pre-Inca Aymara past, and doing so, I contend, because adopting an “Inca” identity following the civil war allowed them to seek national inclusion in ways that asserting an Aymara identity would not have permitted.

Finally, given the strength of the contemporary Aymara political movements in Bolivia today, my reassessment encourages us to rethink the history of the Aymaras’ political initiatives. Their attempts to include themselves within the nation as supporters and allies of the Liberal Party in the early twentieth century suggests that Aymara political initiatives have not all been premised historically on resistance to the nation. Rather, Aymara communities have elaborated a broad spectrum of political projects of both inclusion and exclusion vis-à-vis the nation at distinct historical moments. As the Aymaras continue to engage and negotiate concepts of nation in the twenty-first century, they have converted “Indian politics” into “national politics” in Bolivia.

The Civil War of 1899 in Contemporary Bolivian Politics

Part of what motivates this study of the past is the Civil War of 1899’s relevance to constructions of identity and nation in the early twenty-first century. In contemporary Bolivia, the legacy of this conflict incites both regional and racial debates. Browsing the extensive inventory of pirated DVDs at a street stand in La Paz, I came across the 2009 production *La Guerra Federal*, a film about the civil war made by the former president Carlos Mesa Gisbert and Mario Espinoza Osorio.²⁴ Having paid five bolivianos (less than a dollar), I was curious to see what the mass appeal of 1899 might be. The film renders images of the past immediately relevant to viewers by explicitly connecting the late nineteenth-century events to contemporary Bolivia and to the repeated cries for political and regional autonomy that in 2008 came from the eastern departments of Bolivia, whose inhabitants were eager to loosen their ties to the larger Bolivian nation. That year, as national unity was splintering under President Evo Morales and several departments defined an autonomous status and a new relation to the Bolivian nation, cries of race war were once again heard. From the perspective of the eastern, “non-Indian” departments, the Aymaras were “on the attack again.” This time, however, mandates emphasizing social equality to rectify the historical exploitation of the Indians came from the presidency rather than from the geographical or political periphery.

The film depicts the Creole-Aymara alliance in the Civil War of 1899 as degenerating after the Liberal Party’s victory, with the Aymara indigenous

forces then initiating a race war. Mesa Gisbert underscores the historical social abyss between the Indian and Creole populations and between regions in Bolivia through direct references to the civil war. The film highlights two main aspects of the war: the deterioration and dissolution of the initial alliance between Creoles and Indians that led to the Indians' ostensible "race war" and the Liberal Party's failure to instigate a federal system of governance as originally intended. Mesa Gisbert, who narrates the film, states:

Bolivia in the twenty-first century has to prove to itself that it is possible, without violence, and without blood, to overcome the challenges and integrate [the nation] and make it more inclusive. The indigenous world is the protagonist in the twenty-first century. The world "beyond the Andes" is, in the twenty-first century, at the forefront [of this process]. If we exchange the word "federalism" for "autonomy," we see similarities, and we need to respond favorably . . . and not repeat the dramatic historical errors. I hope that what happened in 1898 and 1899 can serve as a reference point [for the present] so that we can construct a better nation.²⁵

In illustrating the Aymaras' historically menacing role in 1899 and juxtaposing it with that of Evo Morales, currently president of Bolivia and also Aymara, Mesa Gisbert implies that the specter of race war continues to exist among the Creole population. Power dynamics have shifted, and the Indian stands at the center of the nation rather than at the periphery. Roles may be inverted, but the question of regionalism and of regional governance, expressed through a discourse of racism and of racial intolerance, continues to plague the nation and, as the question of departmental autonomy indicates, to threaten its very existence.

The cartoonist Kjell Nilsson-Maki also underscores the mounting racism in Bolivia and the Creole population's alarm at being governed by an "Indian president." In the cartoon "Indian Warrior" (see fig. 3), President Morales's "Indian" features are exaggerated by the cartoonist with the addition of feathers to underscore the menace of the "Indian warrior." This twenty-first-century comic suggests the current racialization of political dissonance in Bolivia; Evo Morales's presidency has introduced a series of reforms that many of his political opponents viewed as an "Indian threat."

Yet the predominance of indigenous politics, including Aymara politics, in Bolivia today should not surprise us. President Evo Morales and the many rich Aymara political currents that fuel Bolivian political debates in many ways represent a continuation of the Aymaras' struggle for citizenship rights.



FIGURE 3. “Indian Warrior,” a cartoon by Kjell Nilsson-Maki showing Evo Morales. Reproduced by permission from www.CartoonStock.com

However, the contemporary political arena also reflects the centrality of an Indian identity in ambivalent historical national discourses—in this case, an identity best defined through the practices of Creole liberal intellectuals and the Caracollo Aymara provincial elite in the early twentieth century—that kept the Indian question at the center of the national agenda.