

The “Long Memory” of Ethnicity in Bolivia and Some Temporary Oscillations

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This chapter highlights the persistence of ethnicity in Bolivian politics and society when viewed over the long term, intertwined with such other key factors as the development of a national state and class conflict. The 2001 census provides the most recent data on how Bolivians classify themselves ethnically. This census asked people over the age of fifteen to state which ethnic group they thought they belonged to. Around 31 percent considered themselves to be Quechua, 25 percent Aymara (the largest populations of both groups found in the western Andean region of the country), and a further 6 percent identified themselves as belonging to one of thirty-one smaller indigenous (*originario*) groups, distributed mainly through the lowlands.¹ Of these, the three largest were Chiquitanos (2.4 percent), Guaranís (1.6 percent), and Mojeños (0.9 percent). In other words, nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of the population said they belonged to one or another of these ethnic groups.

It is worth pointing out that the 1900 census (Bolivia 1901) included a fairly similar question, although it did not specify particular ethnic groups. It concluded that the population was 13 percent white, 51 percent indigenous and 27 percent mestizo. This was the last time that a census used this last category; at the time, the office which carried out the census remarked, “In a short space of time, in view of the progressive laws of statistics, the indigenous race will be, if not removed entirely from the scene, at least reduced to a small fraction” (*ibid.*, vol. 2, 36; cf. pp. 31–32).

When we established CIPCA (the Centro de Investigación y Promoción del Campesinado) in 1971, we chose the term *campesinado* (peasantry), as opposed to any reference to indigenous peoples. From the time of the MNR (Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario) revolution in 1952, this had been the expression in common usage. But thirty years after the founding of CIPCA, fifty years after the revolution, and fully one hundred years after the census

officer foretold the disappearance of the indigenous population—62 percent of all Bolivians identified themselves as belonging to an indigenous or *originario* people. For many, the term *indígena* is more pejorative than mestizo, and it is for this reason that many define themselves both as Quechua or Aymara and at the same time as mestizo. However, those who identified themselves as mestizo in the 2001 census did so in a different sense than in 1952. For most, it no longer implies a denial of their belonging to one of these *originario* peoples (Seligson 2006, 13–19).

The greatest concentration of indigenous people is to be found in the western Andean region (ranging from 66 percent in Chuquisaca to 84 percent in Potosí), an area that accounts for two-thirds of the total indigenous population. However, regional development in the lowlands and the cities of eastern Bolivia, which accelerated in the years after the 1952 revolution, attracted numerous waves of migrants, and in these areas today a significant proportion of the population is of Andean origin.² As a consequence of migration, more than half of those who say they are Quechua, Aymara, or members of the main lowland indigenous groups now live in cities, where they are more inclined to feel that they are also mestizos.³ Here, they do not necessarily speak to one another in their language of origin, especially those of the younger generation.

The data quoted above show that although major changes have taken place over the last century, there have also been some important underlying historical continuities. In spite of the obvious social changes that have taken place, especially since the time of the Chaco War (1932–1934), it becomes clear that here we confront Fernand Braudel's concept of long historical cycles. Both at the local level and among indigenous peasant movements, Silvia Rivera has termed these as "the long memory" (beyond the "short"), principally the centuries-old survival of colonialism and neocolonialism. We will look at this across three periods of time: under colonial society and its neocolonial aftermath, under the revolutionary state as it emerged after 1952 with its "peasant" agenda, and with the reemergence of ethnic politics as of the end of the 1960s.

Colonial and Neocolonial Society

The importance of the Audiencia of Charcas, the precursor of modern Bolivia, resided in its mines and the abundance of its indigenous labor force. The forced labor draft known as the *mita* was the institution that effectively

linked the two.⁴ A dual society was welded together by the *mita* and other forms of taxation. Channeled through indigenous colonial authorities (given the Caribbean name of *caciques* by the Spaniards), these taxes legitimized the persistence of indigenous peoples for the Spanish crown, each with their own culture, organization, and territory. This was the essence of what Tristan Platt (1982) termed the "colonial pact." It was precisely the weakening of this pact as a consequence of the mid-eighteenth-century Bourbon reforms that led to the indigenous risings of Túpac Amaru in Cusco and the Kataris in Charcas between 1780 and 1784. These were events that remained alive in the collective memory of the descendants of those defeated.

After these rebellions were put down, the Spanish crown proceeded to abolish the system of *caciques*. However, neither then, nor during the period that followed Bolivia's independence in 1825 (itself stimulated by the indigenous rebellion), was the colonial system broken as such. Rather, the asymmetries and systems of exploitation became more evident. Moreover, with the recovery of silver mining, the new state no longer required the indigenous system of taxation (preserved as the euphemistically named *contribución territorial*). Community lands were increasingly acquired to feed the expanding hacienda system of agricultural estates, with former *comuneros* (members of indigenous landholding communities) being transformed into peons. A century after independence, the surface area belonging to communities and kinship groups (known as *ayllus*) had shrunk to less than half its previous dimensions, provoking endless rebellions among these communities that were met in turn by repression and even massacres by the army. This helps explain why, when the army was sent to the Chaco in the war against Paraguay, many communities and even hacienda peons took advantage of the situation to widen the scope of what had become an undeclared indigenous war.

This transformation of the colonial pact into an even more asymmetric pattern of exploitation helped to consolidate what we now call a "neocolonial" society. What both societies had in common was the confrontation of a small but dominant elite (considered to be descendants of the original Spanish *conquistadores* and colonists and identified with the culture and history of Europe) against a majority who were the descendants of those peoples who had previously inhabited these lands. The latter were referred to first as *naturales*, and then as *indios* (because of Columbus's initial confusion as to where he had landed) or *indígenas*. They were also referred to as *originarios* (descended from the original inhabitants) and *agregados* (in-migrated

from other indigenous communities) if they continued to live in *ayllus* and communities, or as *yanaconas* (and, during the republic, *pongos*) if they had moved into direct dependence on Spanish landlords and their hacendado successors or into other forms of service in the city.

Mestizos, meanwhile, a growing group in the middle, were of two main types. They initially consisted of biological mixed-race individuals, people of mixed Spanish and indigenous blood who tended to form part of the “republic of Spaniards.” However, little by little, the prevalent form of *mestizaje*, or mixture, became cultural: people who were biologically indigenous but who had lost contact with their rural origins and who wanted to create a new identity for themselves. This sort of intermediate status gained importance under the new republic, to the extent that it came to distinguish itself from another culturally mestizo subaltern group termed *cholo* (Barragán 1990). This group was closer to those indigenous groups from which they too had emerged. *Cholos* did not identify themselves as such, since this was a disrespectful term conferred on them by others. A classic but gloomy description is to be found in the essay by Alcides Arguedas entitled “Pueblo enfermo” (1909).

The colonial and neocolonial regime was somewhat different in the eastern lowlands of Bolivia. This was due to a number of factors, such as lower population density, the dispersion of and differences between a multiplicity of ethnic groups, and the absence of mining. Ethnic relationships were therefore much more varied. Some groups had no contact with one another, while others coexisted in a state of constant warfare, such as that between the Guaranís and Chiriguanos. At the other end of the spectrum, members of ethnic groups were exploited on haciendas. And we should not forget the specific way in which some entered the colonial world through religious missions and settlements. During the republican era, new points of contact emerged as a consequence of the opening up of the rubber extraction industry and its corollary the war in Acre (of 1903), as well as expeditions to conquer new lands and peoples. Later on, the Guaraní people became ensnared in the Chaco War, a conflict in no sense of their own making. The aftermath of the war saw rapid expansion of livestock ranching throughout the Guaraní territory.

But it would be wrong to conclude, as some seem to think, that the political class during this long period of colonial and neocolonial rule was constituted solely by a dominant white minority, possibly enlarged by mestizo allies, and that indigenous peoples (who constituted the great majority of the population) simply adopted a passive, prepolitical posture. That this

may have been what the elite hoped for is another matter. The continuous struggles and rebellions of indigenous peoples, both during the colonial period and then under the republic, are evidence of constant political activity. Also highly political (from a rather different point of view) was the role played by *caciques* and other indigenous authorities, albeit from a position of inferiority—providing, as they did, the linkage between the “republic of *indios*” and that of white people. We have already mentioned how the general uprising of 1780–1784, which threatened the colonial regime as never before, also had the unexpected effect of acting as a wake-up call to the *criollo* elite, demonstrating the real possibility of independence. Very few indigenous people were ever invited to take part in the wars of independence, however.

When the new republican state sought to establish itself without the involvement of indigenous peoples, these populations continued to respond politically. They resisted the subjugation of their territories, as well as taking part in the various conflicts prompted by *criollo* politicians who wanted to take power for themselves. Enraged by the need to defend their threatened lands, they repeatedly allied themselves with different emergent political groups, even though time after time this trust was betrayed once these groups established themselves in power. This is what happened, for example, when they supported the overthrow of General Mariano Melgarejo in 1871, following his expropriation of lands previously belonging to indigenous communities. Again in 1899, indigenous groups rallied to support the insurrection of liberals based in La Paz against conservatives in Sucre. It also happened a third time, two decades later, in 1921 during Bautista Saavedra’s republican revolution against the liberals (Albó and Barnadas 1995, fig. 31). On that occasion, they went so far as to form an alliance between Saavedra’s Republican Party and a new “*cacique*” movement, so called to commemorate the former *caciques* of colonial times (Choque and Ticona 1996, 35–45).⁵

Ideological justifications for a hierarchical and discriminatory society varied in some respects between the colonial period and the neocolonial republic, but in ways that led in fairly similar directions. Notwithstanding the stratified heritage of Spanish society, with some almost sacred flourishes (God was on the Spaniards’ side), there was a debate during the early part of the colonial period about the human condition of the *indios*. Although it was agreed that Indians were indeed human, they were confronted by a series of restrictions on their juridical standing: for example in holding public or religious office. The process of *mestizaje* tended to generate a sophisticated layering of castes (Szeminski 1983), depending on the mix of white, indigenous,

and even black (even though the latter were never numerous in Charcas/Bolivia). By contrast, the first century of the republic saw the rise of so-called social Darwinism, which, with its veneer of science, exalted the superiority of the white race (Demelas 1981). The subordination of former *comuneros* within the hacienda system was seen as a boon to the indigenous population that would help them overcome the limitations of their race.

To sum up, the asymmetric dualism of colonial society persisted, and in some respects became even more pronounced, with the advent of republican neocolonialism. However, the counterpart to this was the persistence of resistance among the *originario* peoples thus dominated. From its origins, Bolivian multiculturalism was such that it sustained the blatant asymmetries of neocolonial society. This is its founding structure, the “original sin” that, in one way or another, continues to shape its historical destiny.

The 1952 State and the Campesinos

Bolivia’s defeat at the hands of Paraguay in the Chaco War presaged a profound national crisis and precipitated the search for a new kind of country. Some traits of this were already made clear in the 1938 Constituent Assembly (Barragán 2005, 359–71). However, the real change came about with the bloody 1952 revolution, spearheaded by the MNR, whose chief, Víctor Paz Estenssoro, assumed the presidency. Thus it was that the “1952 state” came into being, and with it some significant but secondary modifications; it would last until it was finally dismantled in 1985.

The 1952 state represented the longest and most successful attempt in Bolivian history to fashion a governing structure that was at once relatively solid and inclusive of the population as a whole. It contrasts with what George Gray (2006a) has called “the [Bolivian] state as a *modus vivendi*.” In economic terms, this period saw the emergence of state-owned companies or corporations. The first of these was the Bolivian Mining Corporation (Comibol), the fruit of the nationalization of the mines. This was followed by the founding of YPFB (Yacimientos Petroleros Fiscales Bolivianos) in the oil sector and a number of others under the aegis of the Bolivian Development Corporation (CBF). Inspired by the PRI in Mexico and by Peronism in Argentina, the regime tended toward the consolidation of an omnipresent and all-powerful party—the MNR—to which a variety of social organizations became appendages. Having come to power with the support of the police against the army, the MNR complemented the former by creating a feared

mechanism known as "political control" (*control politico*) and replaced the latter with "popular militias" principally made up of miners and peasants armed with old Mausers from the Chaco War. Subsequently, a new military academy was inaugurated in the vain hope of building a new army faithful to the revolution.

The 1952 national revolution brought about a series of transformations in the public and social spheres. For our purposes, the following stand out: the introduction of universal suffrage, even for illiterate indígenas who still constituted the great majority of the population; the expansion of rural education in ways that did not question the notions of the traditional Spanish-language educational system as a civilizing force; and new forms of peasant unionization, encouraged by the government and backed up by the presence of a substantial number of peasant representatives in Congress. With the support, and sometimes at the behest, of these new peasant unions, agrarian reform managed to dismantle the traditional system of hacienda agriculture in the highlands. Yet at the same time, these reforms created the basis for a new dual agrarian structure on the agricultural frontier. This frontier expanded in the eastern lowlands, the consequence of a strategy of self-sufficiency, modernization, and agricultural diversification, with large units of landholding cheek by jowl with small-scale peasant migrants (*colonizadores*). Thus it was that the counterrevolutionary face of the MNR began to gestate in the eastern lowlands, with the development of a new landowning and agroindustrial oligarchy, the beginnings of what would become one of the country's most important structural conflicts.

In the western highlands, agrarian reform converted the campesinos into the regime's most solid and stalwart allies, militantly opposed to any attempt to subvert the new state. Moreover, "peasant super-states," in which peasant union leaders assumed the main duties of the state, came into being in some areas. These areas included the Quechua-speaking Valle Alto in Cochabamba, which had long resisted landlordism and where the agrarian reform decree (and the future law) had first been promulgated (Dandler 1984), as well as the Quechua-speaking valleys of northern Potosí and the Aymara region around Achacachi, near Lake Titicaca. The peasant organizations enjoyed notable degrees of autonomy but were unquestioning in their loyalty to the MNR. Particularly notorious was the popular regiment of the peasant militia from Ucureña, the town where the agrarian reform was launched. This force was always present whenever there was any sort of uprising against the government, not just in Cochabamba but also more distant parts, such as

the mining districts, where they confronted unrest from workers who had distanced themselves from the government and its agenda, and Santa Cruz, where they helped suppress rebel landowners in what amounted to the first of open breach between *collas* (highlanders) and *campas* (people from the eastern lowlands) (Albó and Barnadas 1995, 217–26; Albó 1999, 467–71).

However, there was a price to be paid for this incorporation of the rural sector, as the state came to ignore and, indeed, actively suppress the cultural identities of Bolivia's rural population. Under the legitimate pretext of eliminating racial discrimination against *indios*, these came to be referred to as just campesinos, and their communal organizations were transformed into peasant unions, even though there were no landlord bosses left, nor any clear demands such as the recovery of lost lands. At least during the early years of the agrarian reform, peasants largely accepted this change—often with pride—even in areas where there had never been landlords or haciendas. They saw it as the way to free themselves from past forms of exploitation and discrimination and become full and modern citizens of the state.

Notwithstanding such changes, the new state was not always successful in meeting its objectives, whether due to conflict between its various component parts, to economic and management problems within Comibol and other state companies, or to the government's growing fiscal dependence on the United States and the rightward shift to which this gave rise—notably in the wake of the Cuban Revolution of 1959.

The MNR finally fell from power with the 1964 coup d'état of General René Barrientos, Paz Estenssoro's vice president during his second term in office. Although the coup ushered in a sequence of military regimes, these nevertheless maintained the basic structure of the 1952 state. Barrientos made it quite clear from the outset that he would maintain—even deepen—agrarian reform. He consolidated the so-called Military-Campesino Pact, which he had signed as vice president during the MNR government. Adopting a populist posture, he was acclaimed as “supreme leader” of the *campesinado* during his frequent visits to peasant communities. The military governments that followed Barrientos lacked this charismatic flair, but the majority of the peasantry regarded them as allies. They saw them as leaders following in the tradition of the MNR, which had bestowed on them the agrarian reform; little consideration was given to the fact that the military had overturned the party of the national revolution and had curtailed the democratic system.

The 1952 state, and the ideology on which it was based, was not therefore just a simple reproduction of the neocolonialism that had preceded it. Well

over a century after the country's independence, there was at least a widespread recognition that all within its borders were members of the Bolivian nation-state. No longer were people just Bolivians in a formal sense; they felt themselves to be such. But in spite of the considerable effort made politically to incorporate indigenous peoples as *campesinos* in ways that were more equitable and formal than before—imbuing in them a sense of liberation—the new state basically preserved the old colonial structure through time-honored means, as well as ways that were new and rather more subtle.

This structure was no longer built on the exclusion and direct exploitation on haciendas; rather, it depended on a deep and persistent inequality between rural and urban areas, particularly in terms of access to common goods and services. In a more ideological sense, the 1952 state deprived people of their *originario* identity, this being the necessary price for achieving full citizenship. To be sure, the ideal of the 1952 state was to build a society that was more inclusive, but also more homogenous, through the adoption of mestizo culture. Society was no longer to be *indígena*, but rather subject to a common culture ever closer to that of the dominant *criollo*/white society with its civilizing mentality. The means to this end was the state school system (which had expanded to the most remote corners of rural Bolivia), the peasant unions supported by the *comandos* of the MNR, and the system of military service which rested essentially on recruiting young people of rural origin.

Paradoxically then, a system originally designed to overcome ethnic discrimination—and thus welcomed by those affected—ended, boomerang-like, by creating yet another form of cultural discrimination. Years later, Juan Condori Uruchi, a young Aymara university student who had not lived through this phase, expressed this lucidly in the following terms: "They told us that we would be liberated if we ceased to be *indios*. We believed them, and almost without realizing it, bit by bit, we found ourselves reduced to a mere social category—'campesinos'—and by this means we are losing our condition as Aymara people."⁶

The Reemergence of Ethnicity

Condori's comment reflects the first inklings of a deeper understanding of the sociocultural structure and of the collective subconscious, the "long memory." Two dynamics were at work here. The first, frustration with the unfulfilled promises of the 1952 revolution, was perhaps the more negative.

In spite of the efforts of the dominant *criollo* society to inculcate greater equality, the marginalization of rural and popular society persisted. People continued to consider themselves second-class citizens, a feeling that became rather more pronounced during the years of military government. The second was rather more positive and had to do with a growing awareness of cultural identity. This was assisted by the establishment of a network of educational radio stations, mostly run by institutions linked to the Catholic Church. By retransmitting in indigenous languages, often with a high level of audience participation, these contributed to developing (sometimes without really meaning to do so) a new sense of belonging among Aymaras and Quechuas. These came to realize that their numbers were much more extensive than they had previously thought from their experience in the small communities where they lived. The presence of privately run promotion projects was also influential, as well as the contribution of particular researchers and intellectuals committed to highlighting the cultural and ethnic dimension. Fausto Reinaga, a militant writer (1969), stands out among the latter. In spite of its colonial-style “civilizing” approach, expansion of the educational system contributed to opening the eyes of those reaching secondary and even university levels.⁷

The movement known as Katarismo was the first real expression of this new spirit. It began at the end of the 1960s, its primary adherents young Aymara students who had one foot in the countryside and the other in the city and who had not personally experienced the earlier period of agrarian reform. Significantly, the main geographical nucleus of Katarismo was in precisely those *originario* communities that, two centuries earlier, had fostered the rebellion of Túpac Katari, the great anticolonial hero of the 1780s from whom the movement took its name. The Kataristas would invoke the slogan “We are not the 1952 campesinos any more.” And elaborating on their hero’s supposed last words, they would proclaim, “Túpac Katari has returned, and we are millions.”

The meteoric rise of Katarismo during and after the Banzer dictatorship (1971–1978) and its consolidation in the first few years after Bolivia’s return to democracy (1982–1983) has been dealt with elsewhere, notably by Rivera (1983 and 2003, 148–84); Albó (1985) and Hurtado (1986). Here I limit myself to highlighting some of the characteristics of this process, both internal and external.

Internally, it implied the dismantling of the Military-Campesino Pact and the end to the ideas and illusions it had imbued among peasant organizations

for over a decade. In a broader sense, it also implied going beyond the "short memory" (Rivera 2003, 179) that extended no further than the 1953 agrarian reform and the hopes this had created for homogenous citizenry based on the 1952 state. In its place, it invoked a long memory that harked back to the (neo)colonial state and the need to destroy it. It was by no means a coincidence that this paradigm shift happened at a time when the leadership of the peasant movement was undergoing change. During the period of the short memory, leadership came mainly from the former haciendas of Cochabamba, some dating back to colonial times, as well as from the Achacachi region in the Altiplano, where haciendas had also prevailed, at least since the expropriation of indigenous lands in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By contrast, the leaders of the Kataristas, who revived the long memory, came primarily from the same indigenous communities and *ayllus* where Túpac Katari had been active in the 1780s.

Two other landmarks deserve a mention. In 1982, just after democracy was restored, the Confederación Indígena del Oriente Boliviano (CIDOB) was set up, an organization that, over the years, managed to bring together all the smaller ethnic groups from the lowlands. Then in 1983, the second congress of the Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB) produced and disseminated its political thesis (CSUTCB 1983), stating for the first time:

"Enough of integration and cultural homogenization. . . . We want . . . the construction of a plurinational and pluricultural society which, upholding the unity of the state, combines and develops the diversity of the Aymara, Qhechwa, Tupiguaraní, and Ayoreode nations, and all the others who integrate it."

It is important to note that this whole process of recovering ethnic consciousness was something essentially endogenous to Bolivia, taking place as it did well before the ethnic factor began to loom large on the international scene. In this respect, the sort of initial resistance expressed by the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) to incorporating the Katarista leaders is revealing, influenced as it was at the time by an exclusively class-based paradigm that dominated the international arena. Indeed, when Bolivia returned to democracy in 1982, the COB was reluctant even to accept the use of native languages under the SENALEP (Servicio Nacional de Alfabetización y Educación Popular) literacy program.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 were key international milestones in the crisis of the class-based ap-

proach that had prevailed over most popular movements, including those of Latin America, and in the adoption of a more ethnic paradigm. The significance of ethnicity was given salience by the many ethnic conflicts that broke out in the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. By this time, the Katarista agenda was already well developed, and even the less numerous lowland ethnic peoples had come together in the CIDOB.

These changes in the international paradigm had an important impact in transforming the perceptions of traditional parties in Bolivia—both on the left and the right. These had previously regarded the initiatives of the Kataristas and others like them as the dilettante taste of a few crackpots. They had tended to see *indigenismo* as confirming the “primitivism” of the peasantry, or even as a dangerous sort of deviationism that could end up in racism. The powerful mineworkers’ movement, led by the COB, used such ideological arguments to justify its vanguard role over the peasantry and the “*indiecitos*”—the “little Indians” whose ownership of land rendered them essentially petit bourgeois. Such theoretical justifications were effectively underpinned by the colonial mentality of the state, both before and after 1952.⁸

With all the changes that took place in Eastern Europe, the parties of the Left—some more quickly than others—woke up to the importance of the ethnic dimension. But before this, other movements appeared on the scene that were more populist in nature than the Kataristas and CIDOB. They included *Conciencia de Patria* (Condepa), led by the self-styled “Compadre” Carlos Palenque. Condepa emerged in 1988 to become a significant force in Aymara politics in La Paz. A year later, the *Unión Cívica Solidaridad* (UCS), founded by the beer magnate Max Fernández, made its appearance and developed into a movement of more national scope than Condepa. Although Fernández avoided ethnic or ideological rhetoric, he was characterized by political analysts as a *cholo* politician. Some parties of the Right also incorporated elements of ethnic discourse.⁹ Among the last to do so was the MNR, or more precisely its presidential candidate in the 1993 elections, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. Prompted by public opinion survey findings, Sánchez de Lozada decided to invite Víctor Hugo Cárdenas, an Aymara Katarista, to be his vice presidential running mate. Thus it was that, for the first time, an indigenous leader became the country’s vice president (Albó 1994). Whether this choice was a merely piece of opportunism or in fact an acknowledgment of the political importance of the ethnic factor, from this point onward ethnicity was something that could no longer be ignored.

It is worthwhile pausing a moment to analyze how this old and new paradigm—which connects with a long historical cycle that goes back at least to the colonial period—adapted itself to the new scenario of the Bolivian state in the late twentieth century. As of 1985, by means of a simple decree (no. 21060), the state of that emerged after 1952 gave way to a new paradigm. The so-called New Economic Policy embraced the neoliberal model of globalization in vogue at the time throughout Latin America (see chapters 12 and 13).

The economic shock that set these changes in motion was made easier to bear—even for popular sectors—by the climate of uncertainty created by galloping inflation and devaluation between 1982 and 1985, and the social chaos and lack of effective government that resulted. Stringent monetary stabilization helped generate a degree of greater tranquility among the population, even though the social cost was high. Perhaps the most problematic aspect was the “relocalization” (a euphemism for mass layoffs) of most of the workers in the state mining industry. Whether by design or not, this policy caused mineworkers to lose the hegemony they had enjoyed previously as the proletarian vanguard of the popular movement. A similar fate also beset other workers, with less-efficient labor hemorrhaging into the much more precarious informal economy. This sort of economic instability had always been a feature of the indigenous peasant sector and, consequently, it was less affected by the economic crisis of the 1980s and its aftereffects; indeed, the *campesinado* acquired a greater degree of protagonism within the popular movement. As time passed, peasants were joined by other informal workers, whose numbers were swollen by rural-urban migrants and displaced mineworkers.

During Sánchez de Lozada’s first term (1993–1997), when vice president Cárdenas also presided over the Congress, a number of second-generation reforms were approved. These had two main logics to them. On the one hand, policies associated with the New Economic Policy were reinforced; on the other, there was a greater preoccupation with social and, indeed, indigenous affairs. So far as the latter were concerned, the 1994 constitutional reform defined the country as “multiethnic and pluricultural” (Article 1), while Article 171 introduced the concept of the TCO (*tierra comunitaria de origen*, or indigenous territory). This article recognized the main attributes of indigenous peoples and their territory in concordance with Agreement 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO), ratified by Bolivia in 1991 in the wake of

the historic march by lowland indigenous peoples to La Paz. As a corollary to the New Economic Policy, the Law of Capitalization (1994) privatized former state companies on the lines of joint ventures and gave profits from them a social function in the shape of the Bonosol, which extended benefits to those aged 65 or more. The spectacular increase in proven gas reserves (in large part anticipated in advance by YPFB) was a consequence of the generous terms extended to multinational oil and gas companies.¹⁰

Three further laws passed at this time were particularly relevant to this dialectical relationship between the two logics. On the one hand, the 1994 Education Reform Law was spurned by the teachers because it withdrew various privileges they had gained in the past and weakened their job stability; at the same time, it introduced the principle of interculturality and bilingual teaching throughout the educational system. This clearly favored the indigenous population and, had it been implemented to the letter, would have had positive effects in helping to build a more pluricultural country. Similarly, the 1996 INRA (Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria) Law both helped open up the land market to the benefit of large agricultural concerns and, paradoxically, introduced the TCOs as a form of landholding for indigenous peoples. Then the 1994 Popular Participation Law, reflecting the demands of grassroots organizations, helped develop and strengthen municipal government across the country. It gave powers and resources to rural municipalities which had previously existed only on paper. It also gave a legal standing to grassroots OTBs (*organizaciones territoriales de base*, territorial base organizations), as well as oversight roles to, among others, indigenous communities and peasant unions (failing fully to realize that the latter were also often “indigenous”).

From the outset, there were many who asked whether these concessions toward ethnicity were part of a strategy on the part of global powers to weaken the state and thereby impose their liberal economic model—a bit like the strategy of bread and circuses of ancient Rome—or whether it was more a response to pressure from below by indigenous peoples seeking to achieve recognition. In all probability, it was a bit of both. Without such pressure, it is unlikely that the government or international donors would have thought it necessary to go down this road. In Bolivia, the World Bank initially resisted the intercultural, bilingual approach of the educational reform on the grounds of financial inefficiency, rather like the way that the COB had opposed the approach of the SENALEP program years before on the grounds that it was not grounded on principles of class. However, it also seems to be

the case that, once the power groups had accepted the need to respond to this sort of pressure, they did everything possible to ensure that it supported their interests. Indeed, they saw it as a way of deflecting attention away from class struggles toward more cultural concerns. Thus it was that the fear of the *indio alzado* (the resurgent Indian) pushed the state, and even international financial agencies, to make concessions toward the *indio permitido* (the tolerated Indian).¹¹

Here some credit must go to Cárdenas, with his origins among the *indios alzados* of the Kataristas. His skill as president of the Congress led that body to pass a number of measures that favored indigenous groups, despite the fact that parliament was clearly ill-disposed to do so. It was also from his office as vice president and from a new National Office for Ethnicity, Gender, and Generations that the first steps were taken toward what, in 1997, was to become the Consejo Nacional de Markas y Ayllus del Qullasuyu (Conamaq). Still, Cárdenas paid a high price for his role in a government whose economic model was neoliberal and whose leader, over the years, came to be seen to represent the very antithesis of national interests. Cárdenas pushed and shoved, managing to open up the state to the *indio permitido*, but then he found himself overwhelmed in the surge of the *indio alzado* (of which he was once one).

Initially, at least, the popular movement referred to these second-generation laws as *leyes malditas* (cursed laws) imposed by the World Bank. But this view changed to some extent when they were put into effect. This was particularly true of Popular Participation, which soon became referred to as a *ley bendita* (a blessed law), because it helped switch a significant percentage of state resources toward rural areas for the first time. And despite inevitable corruption and mistakes made along the way, Popular Participation quickly became a key instrument in helping build popular power at the local level. Thus it was that in the December 1995 municipal elections, the first to take place after the passage of the new law, more than five hundred peasants and *indígenas* were elected as municipal councilors (*concejales*) or, in some cases, mayors. In the 2000 municipal elections, that number rose to over one thousand, or 65 percent of the total number of seats (Albó and Quispe 2004, 35).

One of the most notable things about the 1995 municipal elections was the emergence of the Asamblea por la Soberanía de los Pueblos (ASP/IU), which would later become the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo). Peasant organizations in Cochabamba, under the leadership of Evo Morales, the leader of the coca growers' association, had sufficient political instinct to see that the Law

of Political Participation—which some still saw as *maldita*—provided them with a means to construct a political instrument, albeit at the local level. They quickly sought to register their party with the electoral court, skillfully dodged the legal objections made by merging with an already-existing party, and less than a year after it was founded they topped the poll among the rural municipalities of Cochabamba.

This was the beginning of the rise of the MAS. In the 1997 elections, when Hugo Banzer emerged as president following a run-off vote in Congress, the MAS managed to elect four deputies: all *indígenas*/peasants and all from Cochabamba. By April 2000, rejection of neoliberal globalization had become more widespread. It started with the “water war” in Cochabamba and was followed up by a string of roadblocks across the Altiplano (led by the Aymara Felipe Quispe) and in the coca-producing Chapare (led by Morales). In January 2002, Congress expelled Evo, accusing him (without foundation) of being responsible for the deaths of two policemen in a clash with the coca growers. This maneuver, however, had the opposite effect: it cast him into the limelight, and in the presidential elections of the following July he came in second, a mere 1.4 percentage points behind Sánchez de Lozada. Between the MAS and Felipe Quispe’s Movimiento Indígena Pachakuti (MIP), *indígenas*/peasants came to occupy nearly a third of the seats in Congress. A little more than a year later, a series of protests against the new government’s gas policies (considered to be overly favorable to the interests of foreign companies) culminated in massive roadblocks and demonstrations, mainly in and around the city of El Alto. The violent response of the government helped tilt the advantage in the protestors’ favor, forcing Sánchez de Lozada to resign the presidency and then flee the country. Following two transition governments—led by Carlos Mesa and Eduardo Rodríguez, respectively (by constitutional succession)—fresh elections in December 2005 ended in the landslide victory for Evo and the MAS. Not since the return to democracy in 1982 had a government been elected by such a large margin.

Much of the symbolic political capital accumulated since then by Morales and the MAS comes from his being the first militant *indígena* ever elected president in Bolivia—or, for that matter, anywhere in Latin America.¹² However, his electoral support did not come only from the indigenous sector; he was supported by other social movements, including the *cocaleros*, trade unions (both campesino unions and urban workers), and neighborhood associations (*juntas vecinales*). He also appealed to the traditional Left, which

had been displaced politically since 1985, and even to concerned sectors of the middle class.

Beyond such symbolic appeal, Morales's program combined an ethnic discourse (synthesized by proposals for a plurinational and intercultural country) and a more traditional left-wing one that sought to improve the distribution of resources and opportunities at home while at the same time increasing the state's scope for maneuver and autonomy vis-à-vis multinational business interests and the foreign countries backing them.¹³ To this end, the MAS government has taken important steps toward rebuilding a powerful and unitary state. In many respects, this harks back to the 1952 model, but it also projects a new message regarding ethnicity and the need to destroy all vestiges of neocolonialism. It thus seeks to combine the plurinational quality of the new state with one that is strong and unitary.

Internationally, the government found itself on an unusually favorable footing, both economically (given the high prices of gas and other commodities) and politically (in view of the leftward shift in many other Latin American countries). Domestically, however, the growing confrontation between the western highlands and valleys, the poorest part of the country and home to the majority of the population, and the more affluent power groups able to rally support in the lowland crescent (the *media luna*, or half moon usually understood to comprise the departments of Santa Cruz, Tarija, Pando, and Beni), has created a difficult situation. As José Luis Roca shows in chapter 4, this polarization has a long history behind it. To some extent it was mitigated by the strengthening of municipalities under the Law of Popular Participation, but it returned with new force during the short and weak administration of Carlos Mesa (2003–2005). Mesa's period in office revealed the stark opposition between the 2003 "October Agenda" strongly supported in El Alto and the western part of the country and the 2004 "July Agenda" of Santa Cruz and the *media luna*. Arguably, this is a contradiction that has been unnecessarily exacerbated by some of the positions adopted by the MAS government.

This conflict demands analysis of the meaning of autonomy within a state that is at once unitary and plurinational. What emerges is that, in practice, there are a range of different sorts of autonomy: the departmental autonomies demanded by the *media luna*, municipal autonomies inspired by the Law of Popular Participation, and the indigenous territorial autonomies defended by the government. Each has different powers and responsibilities that are

yet to be properly defined. This task of definition was central to the work of the Constituent Assembly, which starkly revealed the conflicting agendas of the ruling MAS majority, perhaps overly dazzled by the 54 percent majority it won in the July assembly elections, and an opposition minority determined to recover the ground lost to the MAS. This is the paradox of a government that came to power through democratic, electoral means, winning a substantial majority but which, failing to remove its opponents from the field, found itself unable to carry out its plans. This contrasts, for example, with the situation in 1952 when, following the bloody revolution that destroyed the opposition, the MNR imposed its own agenda.

Some Recurrent Dialectical Traits

To conclude, this section will briefly highlight some of the dialectical tensions that tend to repeat themselves through history and which help us detect some of the continuities that underlie widely varying conjunctures. The first two are, in my opinion, the most fundamental; the others are complementary.

The first tension is between ethnic identity—or identities—and a unifying national identity. In remotest times, there was a diversity of ethnic identities. These only crystallized around specific territorial notions following the patterns of settlement that took place during the colonial period. This period also saw a dilution of ethnic particularities through the emergence of a more generic polarization between white Spaniards and *criollos*, on the one hand, and *indios* and indigenous groups on the other. There was thus an implicit convergence between different ethnic peoples around the fundamental contradiction of the colonial period and its neocolonial aftermath.

This therefore is the oldest and most enduring conditioning factor affecting both politics and social formation in Bolivia. Neither biological *mestizaje* during the colonial period nor the subsequent period of cultural *mestizaje*, which after 1952 became the ideological backdrop of Bolivian national identity, has managed to replace it—as the reemergence of ethnic politics from the 1960s onward makes plain.

A legal corollary of this first tension is the search for greater complementarity between individual citizen rights—which point toward national unity—and collective rights, among which the specific rights of each indigenous group loom large. Indigenous peoples thus have a double demand: to be first-class citizens, without discrimination on the basis of ethnic origins,

while at the same time having their right to be different respected. In other words, they want to be equal while maintaining their different cultural identities. This can also have consequences for territoriality and the degree of unity and autonomy within a territory, not just with respect to departments and municipalities but also to other criteria derived from their identity and organization as indigenous peoples.

The second tension is between ethnicity and class. This relates to the way in which the (neo)colonial structure came about. The polarization between the Spanish-*criollo* on top and the indigenous beneath already had many of the contradictory elements of a ruling class versus an exploited one. How this was explained in terms of class conflict is rather more recent, linked to new ways of interpreting politics, society, and the economy that were introduced in Europe during the course of the nineteenth century. But the way in which such ideas arrived and adapted themselves to the reality of Latin America—from Mexico down to the southern tip of Chile—has maintained this dialectical tension. At the beginning of the twentieth century, these new Marxist currents involved a degree of synthesis when it became clear that the *indio* was the poorest of the poor. Influenced by the thinking of José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru, this was highlighted in Bolivia by people such as Tristán Marof and José Antonio Arze.¹⁴ Later on, however, because of the greater degree of internationalism of the Marxist-inspired parties, the tendency was to view class struggle as the fundamental contradiction. The ethnic contradiction was relegated to something superstructural, or even as something dangerously racist.

The rediscovery of the cultural wealth of poor indigenous people came about first through the work of artists and literary figures. One such was the novelist and student of Quechua, Jesús Lara, who was also the Communist Party's presidential candidate in 1951. More recently there has been the filmmaker Jorge Sanjinés. But it was also the achievement of *originario* peoples themselves. In spite of being organized in peasant unions, they began to appreciate the importance of different cultural ideologies, especially during the decadence of the 1952 state during the period of the military regimes. They began to insist on the importance of their diverse cultural identities, seeing themselves as distinct ethnic peoples and not just as generic *indios* or *indígenas*. It was only much later that the international concern for ethnicity arose, a product of the collapse of socialism in Europe and Asia and the abandoning of class as the only model for interpreting social reality. The risk was that in the debacle, the baby would be thrown out with the bath water, and one

would fall into a kind of reductionism through reference to the ethnic pole alone. This is what appeared to happen in Bolivia and other Latin American countries when governments and neoliberal-inspired international agencies began to incorporate multiethnicity and pluriculturalism into their various constitutional arrangements (Sieder 2002). At the same time, they imposed a neoliberal vision which veered toward reducing the size of the state and banishing ideas of class. It is from this that the distinction arises between the *indio permitido*, accepted by the state, and the *indio alzado*, rebellious and revolutionary in ways that the dominant society cannot tolerate.

These changes and continuities over time do not constitute contradictory perspectives where only one is correct. Nor do they constitute a chronological evolution from ethnicity to modern class-based politics, or vice versa. A metaphor that used to be common years ago among the Kataristas states: ethnicity and class are the two eyes through which to understand reality, or the two feet with which to move through it. It is precisely the emergence of Evo and the MAS into government that has led the bull to be grasped by the horns, both in domestic policy and in terms of international relations. His government and the Constituent Assembly needed to exercise caution in using these two eyes, two hands, and two feet when it came to interpreting and transforming Bolivia's complex national reality.

On the way, other complementary dialectical tensions have emerged that relate to the two foregoing. Here I would highlight two. The first, in effect the third of our tensions, is the rural-urban tension. A catalyst here is the fact that it is in rural areas where both poverty and indigenism is concentrated, both demographically and culturally. The cities, on the other hand, concentrate greater wealth and the hegemony of a nonindigenous culture that is open to other cultural influences (whether new or not) emanating from ever more pervasive globalization. This contradiction in the past often led to the perverse and scientifically unsustainable conclusion that the rural sector was poorest precisely because it was most influenced by ancient cultures; the solution therefore was to civilize them and extend cultural *mestizaje*: in other words, to help them abandon their own culture and bring them within the dominant Hispanic-*criollo* one.

In recent decades, an important variant has emerged within this tension, as a consequence of the huge increase in migration, first from the countryside to the cities or to the advancing agricultural frontier, and more recently from Bolivia to other countries. The net effect of this is that the majority of those who define themselves as belonging to indigenous groups now live in

urban areas, often (but not always) in their poor peripheries. Over the long run, second- and third-generation migrants undergo significant changes in their sense of what it is to be *originario*, losing their links with their place of family origin. Still, there are also many who continue to identify themselves as such, even though they no longer speak an indigenous language, and who say they are mestizos at the same time. Many also keep a foot in both areas, as if the city was now another "eco-socioeconomic" resource for their people to make use of. The city of El Alto is the most notable example, although not the only one by any means. Of its population, 74 percent identified themselves as Aymara in the 2001 census, even though only 48 percent speak Aymara (an additional 3 percent speak Quechua). The proportion is lower among the younger generation. It is for this reason that El Alto, which only fairly recently achieved its administrative independence from La Paz, acts as a sort of hinge between the urban metropolis of La Paz/El Alto and the surrounding Aymara countryside where nearly 40 percent of its population was born. It was for this reason that the popular upsurge in October 2003, of which El Alto was the focal point, has been described by many as an "Aymaran rebellion." To some extent, therefore, the strength of migratory flows shifts the rural-versus-urban contradiction to one of rural plus impoverished and ethnically defined urban peripheries versus wealthier, more central, and *criollo* urban areas.

The fourth tension is regionalism. This has polarized into the contradiction between *collas* and *cambas* or, if you will, between the Andean west and the *media luna* that includes both the eastern lowlands and Tarija. These regional antagonisms are of long standing, to the point that some commentators believe they are the main contradiction in the country. Thus it is that the demand for autonomy is so key to the *media luna*. In its current form, this dualism has taken on a new aspect which, according to some, could—if not handled properly—break asunder the viability of Bolivia as a country.

Simplifying things and resisting the temptation to include other equally relevant variables, this tension is not unconnected to the two fundamental ones mentioned previously. The ecological, cultural, socioeconomic, and political differences between the Andean macroregion and the lowlands go back to precolonial times and have persisted with only minor changes (such as the grouping of Tarija with the departments of the eastern lowlands for cultural and economic reasons, even though its most populated portions are ecologically Andean in nature). These are also reasons that go a long way to explaining the present polarization between the Andean west and the *media*

luna. In class terms, the control exercised by the elites of the *media luna* over natural resources is fundamental, from land through to hydrocarbons. There are many more rich people in the lowlands than in the western part of the country, long impoverished by the decline of mining and the loss of links to maritime commerce. If on top of this we add, in ethnic terms, the dominance of Hispanic-*criollo* culture in the *media luna* over that of fragmented and dispersed lowland ethnic minorities and migrants from the Andes, it becomes clear why this polarization finds an echo among other sectors of the population—even within the lowlands, where it had never been challenged before.

These are not the only dialectical tensions that have emerged over the centuries. For example, there is a persistent dilemma between unity and factionalism within social and ethnic movements. There are the regional movements mentioned above. The growing impact of globalization, which among other things reflects itself in international and intercontinental migration, is generating new ties and new identities. But the four tensions I have focused on here should be sufficient to show how, amid the changes that are constantly taking place, we continue to confront problems and issues which have long historical roots.