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Author

Augsburger, Aaron

Publication Date

2018

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

University of California, Santa Cruz

**The Struggle for Hegemony and the Articulation of Plurinationality:
Contrasting Visions of Social Change and State Transformation in
Bolivia's *Proceso de Cambio***

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

POLITICS

with an emphasis in LATIN AMERICAN & LATINO STUDIES

Aaron Augsburger

June 2018

The dissertation of Aaron Augsburger is approved:

Guillermo Delgado-P., Chair

Benjamin L. Read

Megan Thomas

Fernando I. Leiva

Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

The Struggle for Hegemony and the Demand for Plurinationality: Contrasting Visions of Social Change and State Transformation in Bolivia's *Proceso de Cambio*

Aaron Augsburger

Evo Morales and the MAS came to power in 2006 promising fundamental social, cultural, economic and political change, what they called *el proceso de cambio* (the process of change). While Bolivia has witnessed a number of important social, political, and economic changes, while also experiencing the most prolonged period of political stability in its history, significant disputes over land, territory, resources, identity, democracy, and the state remain. These differences have provoked conflicts over the vision, future direction, and transformational potential of Bolivia's process of change. In this dissertation I argue that the central axis along which many of these conflicts rest can be theorized as an antagonism between two differing visions of social change and state transformation, conceptualized on the one hand as a struggle for hegemony, and on the other hand as a demand for plurinationality. Based on 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork, I argue that Morales and the MAS have pursued a vision of state-centered hegemonic change. In contrast, many of the actors that brought Morales to power have challenged the very legitimacy of the nation-state form and its culturally homogenizing practices. As an alternative, they offer a vision of plurinationality that seeks to "refound" Bolivia and recognize the cultures, economies, systems of social and political organization, and overall world visions that co-exist and interact within the geographic boundaries of the country.

Introduction

Every so often there are certain events that transcend their specific time and place, although their true significance is only really knowable to us in the future. When these events that transcend a particular moment, what García Linera labels “condensations of an era,” occur, “they divide history, because they announce that from that point on, social processes will follow new norms, though we only come to realize it years or decades later.”¹ What came to be known as the Water War was one such event in Cochabamba in April 2000 where massive mobilizations of indigenous and popular forces came together to protest a water privatization scheme that had put the community’s water supply under the control of Aguas de Tunari, an affiliate of the transnational corporation Bechtel, that had sharply raised users’ rates.² These protests eventually led to the cancelation of the privatization plan and the return of the Cochabamba’s water company to public hands. This uprising would come to be seen as the opening salvo of Bolivia’s 2000-2005 revolutionary situation that unified disparate social forces in a struggle against the country’s ruling elite and their model of development. This five-year period, which overthrew two sitting governments, ultimately brought Evo Morales, Bolivia’s first indigenous president, and the

¹ Alvaro García Linera, “The Death of the Twentieth-Century Working-Class Condition,” in *Plebeian Power: Collective Action and Indigenous, Working-Class, and Popular Identities in Bolivia*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), p. 117.

² On the Water War, see, for instance, Oscar Olivera and Tom Lewis, *Cochabamba!: Water War in Bolivia*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004); Willem Assies, “David versus Goliath in Cochabamba: Water Rights, Neoliberalism, and the Revival of Social Protest in Bolivia,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 30 (3), 2003, pp. 14-36; and William Finnegan, “Leasing the Rain,” *The New Yorker*, April 8, 2002.

Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement toward Socialism, MAS) to state power in 2006.³

Morales and the MAS came to power promising fundamental social, cultural, economic and political change, what they called *el proceso de cambio* (the process of change). Despite all the lofty goals and expectations that accompanied their rise to power, perhaps not surprisingly Morales and the MAS have not been able to deliver wholesale transformation. While Bolivia has witnessed a number of important social, political, and economic changes, while also experiencing the most prolonged period of political stability in its history, significant disputes over land, territory, resources, identity, democracy, and the state remain.⁴ These differences have provoked considerable tensions and conflicts between civil society actors and the MAS government. In essence, the struggle is over the vision, future direction, and transformational potential of the process of change and is often framed as a profound difference over governance and the development model.

In this dissertation I argue that the central axis along which many of the fundamentally divisive conflicts rest can be usefully theorized as an antagonism between two differing visions of social change and state transformation, conceptualized on the one hand as a struggle for hegemony, and on the other hand as a demand for plurinationality. Since the early days of the MAS administration, but

³ On revolutionary situations, see Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1978); Jeffrey Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia: Class Struggle, Indigenous Liberation, and the Politics of Evo Morales*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011).

⁴ For the most comprehensive overview of the Morales era, see Linda Farthing and Benjamin Kohl, *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and Change*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015).

especially since 2009, Morales and his party have pursued a vision of state-centered hegemonic change. In this process, they play the role of a vanguard that relies on natural resource extraction, agro-industrial expansion, and ideas of resource nationalism and development while, at the same time, maintaining the institutional structure of the pre-existing liberal nation-state. In contrast, many of the actors that formed the backbone of the 2000-2005 insurrectionary mobilizations that brought Morales to power have challenged not only neoliberalism and its model of development and political representation, but also the very legitimacy of the nation-state form and its culturally homogenizing practices. As an alternative, they offer a vision of plurinationality that seeks to “refound” Bolivia through the recognition of the diversity – both indigenous and non-indigenous – of cultures, economies, systems of social and political organization, and overall world visions that co-exist and interact within the geographic boundaries of the country.

Contrasting Hegemony and Plurinationality

Much of the literature focusing on the revolutionary period of 2000-2005 and the current process of change in Bolivia maintains the fundamental causes were related to the failures of neoliberalism and the political party system. These arguments are certainly true, but they only highlight the proximate causes of the insurrections. The “revolutionary epoch” of 2000-2005 was a period of crisis with various short-, medium-, and long-term causes.⁵ Some of the specific short-term

⁵ Raúl Prada, *Horizontes de la Asamblea Constituyente*, (La Paz: Ediciones Yachaywasi, 2006), p. 7.

motivations for the uprisings where the water privatization schemes in Cochabamba and El Alto and the plan to export natural gas to the United States through ports in Chile. These short-term motivations were linked to larger medium-term crises in the model of neoliberalism that had been applied in Bolivia since the mid 1980s, in addition to a crisis of political representation. From a much longer historical perspective, a system of colonialism installed during the conquest had remained through the independence period, the republican period, and even after the country's social revolution of 1952. Thus, the revolutionary period at the turn of the 21st century should also be understood as a decolonial insurrection against an historical system of indigenous oppression and exploitation.

It is important to understand these how these short-, medium-, and long-term causes and histories played out and came together in order to more fully comprehend contemporary Bolivia under Evo Morales and the MAS and the various tensions and contradictions of this current period. Bolivia entered into an era of hegemonic politics during the period between the Chaco War (1932-1935) and the National Revolution of 1952. The revolution and its aftermath overpowered the armed forces and decisively ended the oligarchic *ancien regime*, offering the clearest expression of the organized masses entering the political arena up until that point in time. Since then, Bolivia has seen a number of different hegemonic projects, of which the MAS is only the most recent.⁶ During this period, every government has had to articulate, materially and ideologically, its project in universal terms in order to legitimate itself

⁶ Jorge Viaña, Miguel Foronda, and Hernán Pruden, *Configuración y Horizontes del Estado Plurinacional*, (La Paz: Vicepresidencia del Estado, 2014).

and its actions.⁷ In other words, the ruling classes have been obligated to make it seem that their particular interests are in the interests of all Bolivians. As Gramsci notes, the “development and expansion of a particular [hegemonic] group is conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the ‘national’ energies.”⁸ However, hegemony cannot be reduced to just ideological persuasion or the result of false consciousness, but also involves a crucial material component. Hegemony, Gramsci states, “presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised...in other words that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind.”⁹ Taken together, the universalization of interests and the economic-corporate sacrifices are the fundamental elements of hegemony as a political project, behind which the coercive power of the state ultimately rests.

However, hegemony as a practice of politics is fundamentally tied up with the idea of the liberal nation-state form and its attendant structures of centralized power and hierarchical control. While hegemony is never complete, the ultimate goal of any hegemonic project is to control if not negate social antagonism through the creation of a complete social totality.¹⁰ Hegemony, then, can be seen as an attempt to

⁷ Exceptions to this characterization exist, such as the military dictatorships of Hugo Banzer (1971-1978) and Luis García Meza (1980-1981). It should also be clear that expressing the interests of a particular group in universal terms does not automatically make it so.

⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 182.

⁹ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 161.

¹⁰ See Benjamin Arditti, “Post-hegemony: Politics Outside the Usual Post-Marxist Paradigm,” *Contemporary Politics*, 13:3 (2007), pp. 205-226; and Jon Beasley-Murray, “On Posthegemony,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 22 (2003), pp. 117-125; Jon Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

foreclose contestation, difference, and alterity in any particular social formation. As Howson and Smith argue, “in hegemony, things do not always remain in a state of constant conflict and unresolved antagonism; rather, it is a process whereby the goal is to achieve the highest synthesis.”¹¹ Such a closed social totality is articulated by the class (or classes) that directly or indirectly control the state apparatus.¹² This is where the idea of plurinationality most clearly differs with and challenges hegemony.

For the *Pacto de Unidad* (Unity Pact),¹³ realizing plurinationality requires a radical departure from the vertical power structures of the traditional nation-state. Plurinationality is “a way toward our self-determination as nations and peoples, in order to define our communitarian politics, social systems, economies, political and legal systems, and thus reaffirm our own structures of governance, election of authorities and administration of justice, all with respect for different ways of life and the use of space and territory.”¹⁴ However, this call for self-determination and self-government of the various nations and peoples of Bolivia should not be mistaken for a final end point or a state to be achieved. Theoretically, plurinationality does not

¹¹ Richard Howson and Kylie Smith, “Hegemony and the Operation of Consensus and Coercion,” in Richard Howson and Kylie Smith (eds.), *Hegemony: Studies in Consensus and Coercion*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 10.

¹² Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, *Los Ritmos de Pachakuti: Movilización y Levantamiento Indígena-Popular en Bolivia (2000-2005)*, (Mexico: Bajo Tierras Ediciones, 2008); John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power*, (New York: Pluto Press, 2005).

¹³ The Pacto de Unidad was a conglomeration of various social movements that joined together in 2004 around a common programmatic vision of re-founding Bolivia through a Constituent Assembly, and was the central base of support for Evo Morales and the MAS in the 2005 elections. The central member organizations were the CSUTCB (*Confederación Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*), FNMCB-BS (*Federación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas de Bolivia – Bartolina Sisa*), CSCB (*Confederación Sindical de Colonizadores de Bolivia*), CIDOB (*Confederación de Pueblos Indígena de Bolivia*), and CONAMAQ (*Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu*).

¹⁴ Pacto de Unidad, “Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente,” *OSAL*, 8:22 (2007), p. 167.

seek to express itself in a new social totality but rather as an open, un-sutured collection of various parts that maintain their differences and live within the moment of social antagonism, instead of trying to (forcefully) integrate the opposition into a synthesized whole. The idea of plurinationality is grounded on the recognition and coexistence of difference: different cultures, different economies, and different politics. As Luis Tapia argues, plurinationality “consists in the recognition of the existence of a plurality of heterogeneous political spaces...that maintain their own structures of authority, their own *cosmovisiones* and their own social structures.”¹⁵

Plurinationality, therefore, breaks with hegemonic politics through the recognition and maintenance of difference, although it does so within the framework of an expanded conceptualization of Bolivian citizenship. Indeed, it has been the limited framework of liberal citizenship that has not only continually excluded Bolivia’s indigenous populations from political participation, but it has also maintained hegemony as the only legitimate form of political practice. As Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui argues, in Bolivia “the liberal principle of equality among citizens is, paradoxically, transformed into conditional recognition by the dominant society of the indigenous peasantry’s rights: the latent threat of exclusion combines this false liberty with the inability to recognize the indigenous society’s cultural and social right to be different.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Luis Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, (La Paz: Autodeterminación, 2015), p. 69.

¹⁶ Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “Liberal Democracy and Ayllu Democracy in Bolivia: The Case of Northern Potosí,” *Journal of Development Studies*, 26:4 (1990), p. 117.

Moments of Conflict

In the following chapters I examine three particular empirical situations, or moments, where we can see how the contending visions and strategies of hegemony and plurinationality come into conflict and play out in real, concrete terms. The first moment I analyze is the 2011 TIPNIS conflict where the MAS sought to build a highway through a national park and indigenous territory to connect the eastern lowlands of the country with the western valley and highland regions. The plan drew condemnations and large-scale protests from indigenous movements and urban civil society across the country and caused the government to repeal the proposed highway. While the dispute was related to issues of land access and resources, from the perspective of the MAS it was a national project of economic integration through the expansion of infrastructure. Yet, it raised important issues surrounding the right of prior and informed consultation and consent regarding development projects in indigenous territory and represented the first substantial rupture between the government and its erstwhile supporters.

The following situation stems from the TIPNIS dispute and involves the MAS-influenced split of the highland indigenous organization CONAMAQ. The TIPNIS affair brought a number of smaller internal conflicts within the Unity Pact to a head, forcing the two indigenous organizations, CIDOB and CONAMAQ, to officially cut ties with the Unity Pact and the MAS. In late 2013 the headquarters of CONAMAQ in La Paz was a site of open struggle between two competing factions within the organization. The MAS sided with the pro-government wing and provided

material and police support as that faction physically ousted the elected leadership, took over the office and proclaimed a new council of authorities. Ostensibly an internal dispute over the organization's leadership positions and ideological direction, it was also a confrontation between the state and society and the autonomy of indigenous movements and represents a moment of MAS populist hegemony.

The final empirical moment under investigation deals with the differing paths of constructing official indigenous autonomy in the municipalities of Jesús de Machaca, San Pedro de Totora Marka, and Charagua. Indigenous autonomy, officially made possible in Articles 2, 30, and 290 of the new 2009 constitution and through the 2010 *Ley Marco de Autonomías y Descentralización*, is a central component of plurinationality's vision of state transformation. Yet, since 2009 only one indigenous community has made it through all the bureaucratic hurdles and red tape to officially become autonomous. Analyzing both the possibilities and challenges of creating indigenous autonomy highlights the contrasting ways that the theories of hegemony and plurinationality view the institutional structure of the state.

Taken together and in a very general sense, my analyses of TIPNIS, CONAMAQ, and indigenous autonomy can be seen as an investigation into how the theoretical conflict between hegemony and plurinationality plays out in concrete terms in the spheres of the economy, society, and the state. More specifically, these moments are the crystallization of this relationship with respect to the issue and idea of development, how the government relates to and interacts with civil society groups, and an understanding of the state and its transformation.

Outline of the Dissertation

The following chapter more fully explain the concepts of hegemony and plurinationality in order to highlight the distinct forms of politics associated with each theoretical position. This theoretico-conceptual scheme will serve as a foundation for understanding the three empirical situations I examine in order to further flesh out the contrasting ideas of social change and state transformation that the theories of hegemony and plurinationality envision. In the following three empirical chapters, I compare hegemony and plurinationality at three analytically distinct levels: the economic, the social, and the political. While in reality these three levels overlap and interact, in order to more fully comprehend how exactly hegemony and plurinationality differ it is useful to think about each empirical moment as illustrating one of these analytical levels. I begin by looking at the 2011 TIPNIS conflict as a moment of economic conflict. I next examine the MAS's intervention in CONAMAQ in 2014 as an example of state-society relations. Finally, as an avenue toward analyzing the state and its transformation I look at the attempt to construct indigenous autonomy in three separate indigenous municipalities throughout the country.

Conceptualizing Hegemony and Plurinationality in Bolivia's *Proceso de Cambio*

*Bolivia will be socialist or it will never be a modern country.*¹

*The idea of plurinationality emerges where the construction of a modern nation-state has not been completed.*²

*It is not that nothing has happened, that a new era has not been entered. Rather, that era having been entered, it is necessary now to live in it rather than merely imagine it, and that is inevitably a deflating experience.*³

Since the beginning of the “Left Turn” in Latin America much of the discussion has centered around how (or if) this political swing to the left has led to any type of structural social transformations throughout the region.⁴ Within this general discussion, Bolivia has received a lot of attention due to the power of social movements in that country that overthrew multiple presidents, Evo Morales’ rise to power, the rewriting of the nation’s constitution, and the current government’s

¹ René Zavaleta Mercado, “Bolivia Will Be Socialist Or It Will Never Be A Modern Country,” *NACLA’s Latin America and Empire Report*, 8:2 1974, p. 11.

² Luis Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, (La Paz: Autodeterminación, 2015), p. 123.

³ Clifford Geertz, “After the Revolution: The Fate of Nationalism in the New States,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 235.

⁴ On the “Left Turn” see Maxwell Cameron, and Eric Hershberg (eds.), *Latin America’s Left Turns: Politics, Policies, and Trajectories of Change*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010); Steve Ellner (ed.), *Latin America’s Radical Left: Challenges and Complexities of Political Power in the Twenty-first Century*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Steven Levitsky, and Kenneth M. Roberts, (eds.), *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); and Jeffery R. Webber, and Barry Carr (eds.), *The New Latin American Left: Cracks in the Empire*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2013).

avowed stance against capitalism and for the creation of a new socio-economic order based on the rights of *Pachamama* and *buen vivir*.⁵ However, despite all the radical rhetoric, it has become increasingly clear that there is at least as much continuity with the old neoliberal order under Morales and the MAS as there has been structural change. We should not dismiss the many important changes that have occurred since 2006, including increased attention to societal racism, increased participation in decision-making by the popular majority, rewriting the constitution, alleviation of poverty, increased access to health care, and infrastructure development. However, we also need to have a clear-eyed understanding of the structural continuities that remain, such as the reliance on the extraction and exportation of natural resources as the mode of production, the centralization of power, and the populist clientelism of the MAS. Nevertheless, much of the literature analyzing the current Bolivian conjuncture has focused either on continuity or change, often leaving the whole story only half disclosed.⁶ On the one hand, much of the literature critical of Morales and the MAS fails to articulate a clear understanding of the structural restraints facing a relatively poor, landlocked country that lacks the infrastructural and technological capabilities to seriously challenge the global capitalist system. On the other hand,

⁵ See, for instance, John Crabtree and Ann Chaplin, *Bolivia: Processes of Change*, (New York: Zed Books, 2013); Arturo Escobar, "Latin America at a Crossroads: Alternative modernizations, post-liberalism, or post-development?" *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, (2010); Linda C. Farthing and Benjamin H. Kohl, *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and Change*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, *Los Ritmos Del Pachakuti: Levantamiento y Movilización en Bolivia (2000-2005)*, (Mexico D.F.: Bajo Tierra Ediciones, 2009); Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Refundación del Estado en América Latina: Perspectivas desde una epistemología del Sur*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2010); Jeffery R. Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia: Class Struggle, Indigenous Liberation, and the Politics of Evo Morales*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011).

⁶ An important exception to this general trend is Linda Farthing and Benjamin Kohl, *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and Change*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

most of those who uncritically support the current Bolivian government highlight these challenges while failing to persuasively demonstrate how socio-political and economic structures are indeed fundamentally changing, rather than just being reorganized.

Instead of staking out a position on one side or the other in the above debate, I argue that a central reason for these seemingly antagonistic views lies in the fact that what is actually occurring is a struggle over the vision and future direction of the *proceso de cambio* and indeed how deep and transformational it should be for the Bolivian state and society. What is unfolding in Bolivia is a confrontation between two different conceptualizations of the idea of social revolution and state transformation, which I theorize on the one hand as a struggle for hegemony, and on the other hand as a demand for plurinationality. In this chapter I lay out the theoretical foundations of hegemony and plurinationality in order to clarify each concept's theory of the state, state and society relations, and political strategies for social change. This theoretico-conceptual structure will then serve as the interpretive apparatus for understanding the three empirical moments of conflict I investigate in the following chapters. My analyses of the 2011 TIPNIS conflict, the 2013-14 confrontation between the MAS and the highland indigenous movement organization CONAMAQ and that organization's subsequent splintering, and, finally, the construction of state-sanctioned indigenous autonomous territories will demonstrate how the theoretical conflict between hegemony and plurinationality plays out in concrete terms at the level of the economy, society, and the state.

Hegemony

The concept of hegemony as expounded by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci has gained an increasingly wide currency in recent decades throughout the humanities and social sciences. The concept has been particularly useful for analyzing various social formations and prescribing strategies for change in Latin America.⁷ Before laying out Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony that is most important for our purposes, it will be useful to briefly outline a genealogy of the concept. This will not only help us locate the term's overall significance in Gramsci's thought, but will also help to clarify how a hegemonic form of politics differs substantially from a plurinational politics.

Hegemony derives from the Greek *egemon* (guide, ruler, leader) and *egemonia* (rule, leadership), which "generally means the preeminence or supremacy that a state, social group, or even an individual may exercise over others."⁸ According to Fontana, in ancient Greece one use of hegemony was to describe an alliance where one state attains preeminent military and political leadership over the others. In the *Politics* Aristotle uses the concept to make a dichotomy between

⁷ For analyses of Gramsci's theoretical influence in Latin America, see Walter Mignolo, "Mariátegui and Gramsci in 'Latin' America: Between Revolution and Decoloniality," in Neelam Srivastava and Baidik Bhattacharya (eds.), *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 191-217; Raúl Burgos, "The Ups and Downs of an Uncomfortable Legacy: The Complicated Dialogue between Gramsci and the Latin American Left," *Latin American Perspectives*, 42 (2015), pp. 169-185. For an in depth investigation of how the concept of hegemony has been taken up and utilized in Argentina specifically, see Robert Cavoris, "Intellectuals and political strategy: hegemony, posthegemony, and post-Marxist theory in Latin America," *Contemporary Politics*, 23:2 (2017), pp. 231-29.

⁸ Benedetto Fontana, "Hegemony and Power in Gramsci," in Richard Howson and Kylie Smith (eds.), *Hegemony: Studies in Consensus and Coercion*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 81.

despotic or imperial and hegemonic rule. The term hegemony is used when Aristotle “wants to discuss the leadership of equals in the interest of all, and despotism is used when he discusses the domination of others in the ruler’s self-interest. The distinction here is crucial: the first refers to rule or government of free and equal citizens, while the second describes the power exercised by a master over slaves.”⁹ Like Aristotle, Isocrates distinguishes between hegemonic and despotic rule, but he also adds a second aspect to hegemony “as a guiding or governing principle or idea.”¹⁰ In addition, Fontana points out that Thucydides used the notion of hegemony to show how Athens became “the cultural, moral, and intellectual leader of Greece.”¹¹ More closely related to Gramsci’s theoretical innovation, this second form sees the exercise of hegemony as the generation and organization of a guiding moral, intellectual, and cultural worldview. Thus, even with the ancient Greeks, we can see hegemony as being distinct from pure physical domination, and involving both material and ideological elements.

Similar to one meaning of the concept in ancient Greek thought, according to Raymond Williams there was an early use of hegemony in English during the 16th and 17th centuries signifying “predominance of a more general kind... which includes, as one of its key features, a particular way of seeing the world and human nature and relationships.”¹² This use of the term was in contrast to a more typical form which

⁹ Fontana, “Hegemony and Power in Gramsci,” p. 82.

¹⁰ Fontana, “Hegemony and Power in Gramsci,” p. 82.

¹¹ Fontana, “Hegemony and Power in Gramsci,” p. 82.

¹² Raymond Williams, “Hegemony,” in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 144-145.

indicated overt political domination, particularly between states. Hegemony as a relationship of domination between states has been especially popular in the fields of international relations and international political economy.¹³ Related to this notion of hegemony, in certain forms of Marxist thought the term has been extended from the political predominance between states to relations between classes.¹⁴

Another version of hegemony appeared during the late 19th-early 20th century period in the debates of the Russian Social-Democratic movement. Socialist leaders such as Plekhanov, Axelrod, Trotsky, and, most explicitly, Lenin used hegemony to describe the leading role of the proletariat in a revolutionary alliance of exploited classes (especially involving the peasantry) against tsarism.¹⁵ Lenin argued “as the only consistently revolutionary class of contemporary society, it [the proletariat] must be the leader in the struggle of the whole people for a fully democratic revolution, in the struggle of *all* the working and exploited people against the oppressors and exploiters. The proletariat is revolutionary only in so far as it is conscious of and gives effect to this idea of the hegemony of the proletariat.”¹⁶ Therefore, the proletariat’s duty was to exercise hegemony over other exploited groups in both material and ideational realms in the struggle against capitalism. If it failed to exercise hegemony over the masses and instead focused exclusively on its particular

¹³ See, Robert Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Stephen Gill (ed.), *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention and Hegemony*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Adam David Morton, *Unraveling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy*, (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 108.

¹⁵ Perry Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci,” *New Left Review*, 1/100 (1976), pp. 14-17.

¹⁶ Quoted in Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci,” pp. 16-17.

economic objectives, the proletariat risked falling into the mentality of corporatism and thus failing in its historical revolutionary mission. “The proletariat becomes a revolutionary class only in so far as it does not restrict itself to the framework of a narrow corporatism and acts in every manifestation and domain of social life as the guide of the whole working and exploited population,” argued the Communist Third International. “The industrial proletariat cannot absolve its world-historical mission, which is the emancipation of mankind from the yoke of capitalism and of war, if it limits itself to its own particular corporative interests and to efforts to improve its situation – sometimes a very satisfactory one – within bourgeois society.”¹⁷ In addition, according to Buci-Glucksmann, some factions within Soviet Russia used this Leninist notion of hegemony to combat Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution and argue for the ability of socialism to be developed in one country. Thus, after Lenin’s death, both Stalin and Bukharin argued that the idea of permanent revolution would ultimately run counter to the hegemony of the proletariat in an alliance with the peasantry.¹⁸ Therefore, in early 20th century Marxism the concept of hegemony was used to refer to a class alliance of the proletariat with other exploited groups, above all the peasantry, in a common struggle. But, for reasons that will become clear below, what is important here is that the central actors are predefined classes with objectively defined interests that maintain their predetermined form within the

¹⁷ Quoted in Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci,” p. 18.

¹⁸ Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), pp. 174-175.

alliance. That is, the class alliance itself and its actions do not modify the identity or the interests of the participating classes.

Gramsci and Hegemony

It is from this theoretical environment of early 20th century Marxism that Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony emerges, during his "enforced leisure" in a Mussolini prison.¹⁹ It is well known that Gramsci's prison notebooks are notorious for their fragmentary and incomplete character as they were produced in horrible conditions and under the watchful eye of the prison censor. In addition, Gramsci used theory to illuminate concrete historical cases or political questions and as a result, according to Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's work often appears almost *too* concrete, too historically specific, too delimited in its references, too 'descriptively' analytic, too time and context bound." Consequently, if the general ideas and concepts from the *Prison Notebooks* are not "delicately dis-interred from their concrete and specific historical embeddedness and transplanted to new soil with considerable care and patience," we risk incorrectly opening them up to uses, interpretations, and analyses of which they were never intended.²⁰ Peter Thomas, for his part, claims that anyone interested in Gramsci's thought would "seem called upon not so much to read the

¹⁹ Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 1986, p. 6.

²⁰ Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," pp.6-7.

Prison Notebooks as to decipher them... to translate their formal foreignness into a known literary convention.”²¹

However, while the *Prison Notebooks* are indeed sporadic and fragmented, claims like those above can easily be taken too far. We need to be cognizant of the historical conditions from which theory develops, and care should be taken not to run too roughshod over a concept’s “original meaning” through either conceptual stretching or distortion, which might dull its analytic utility. But, it is the openness of Gramsci’s ideas that make them so useful and it is the incomplete character of his research that have allowed his ideas to travel widely and be used in so many creative ways. All this is to say that a certain element of reconstruction is unavoidable in any interpretation of Gramsci.

According to some analysts, the concept of hegemony does not emerge in Gramsci’s investigations until his period of incarceration from 1926 until his death in 1937.²² However, while it is true that Gramsci fundamentally reworks the concept in the *Prison Notebooks*, it is also clear from Gramsci’s pre-prison writings that he was thinking about the struggle for social change in hegemonic terms. In his early writings Gramsci more or less adopted the idea of hegemony in its Leninist form as a class alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry. In his 1926 essay, *The Southern Question*, Gramsci poses the question of the “hegemony of the proletariat” in Italy, arguing that “the proletariat can become the leading and ruling class to the

²¹ Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010), p. 42.

²² See, for instance, Joseph Femia, “Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci,” *Political Studies*, 23 1, (1975), p. 30.

extent to which it succeeds in creating a system of class alliances which enables it to mobilise the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State; this means, in Italy, the actual relations existing in Italy, to the extent to which it succeeds in obtaining the consent of the large peasant masses.”²³ Further, “the proletariat, in order to be able to rule as a class, must rid itself of all corporative hangovers, of all syndicalist prejudices and incrustations.... they must think as members of a class which aims at leading the peasants and the intellectuals, of a class which can conquer and can build socialism only if aided and followed by the great majority of these social strata. If it does not do this, the proletariat does not become a leading class.”²⁴

However, in the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci further develops the idea of hegemony, expanding it from a purely strategic proletarian class alliance to a more general theoretical concept used to “analyse the forms of established bourgeois State power in the West.”²⁵ As Anderson notes, whereas the term in Russia was used to define the relationship between the proletariat and the peasantry during a period of revolutionary upheaval, the term “was transferred by Gramsci to describe the relationship between the bourgeoisie and proletariat in a consolidated capitalist order in Western Europe.”²⁶ Without abandoning the characteristic class alliance inherited from Lenin, the two aspects that combine to form the core of the Gramscian

²³ Antonio Gramsci, “The Southern Question,” in *The Modern Prince & Other Writings*, (New York: International Publishers, 2000), p. 30.

²⁴ Gramsci, “The Southern Question,” p. 36.

²⁵ Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, p. 200.

²⁶ Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci,” p. 44.

conceptualization of hegemony are now *coercion* and *consent*. Building on Machiavelli's Centaur, half-animal and half-human, Gramsci argues that a "dual perspective" needs to be developed in order to fully comprehend the two-sided nature of all political action.²⁷ In this dual perspective, seeming binaries – coercion is contrasted with consent, violence with civilization, and leadership/direction with domination – are articulated as interrelated levels or moments of politics. It is within this dual perspective that Gramsci locates hegemony, which he also labels in certain instances intellectual and moral leadership, in relation to domination and argues "the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to 'liquidate', or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups."²⁸ Here we can clearly still see the links with Lenin, but as Thomas highlights, Gramsci's hegemony has become "an alternative, 'consensual' political strategy for the working-class movement to that of [Lenin's] dictatorship of the proletariat, which relies largely upon coercive measures."²⁹ Indeed, whereas Marxism has traditionally focused on forms of material domination, here hegemony moves beyond the mere economic supremacy of a corporate class and denotes the moral and intellectual leadership of a group that eschews any narrow economic vision

²⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 169-170.

²⁸ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 57. In a different, earlier iteration Gramsci uses the term "class" instead of the more general notion of "social group." According to Boothman, this shows that Gramsci is much more aware of the prison censors, but also demonstrates that he has expanded and fully developed his conceptualization of hegemony. See Derek Boothman, "A note on the evolution – and translation – of some key Gramscian terms," *Socialism and Democracy*, 14, 2 (2000), pp. 126-127.

²⁹ Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, p. 161.

of its role. The hegemonic group, in effect, tries to “universalize” its interests, both political and economic, in order to lead. As Gramsci argues, “the development and expansion of a particular [hegemonic] group is conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the ‘national’ energies.”³⁰ Thus, in the struggle for hegemony, differing groups “come into conflict and confrontation, until one of them, or at least a single combination of them, tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society – bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a ‘universal’ plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups.”³¹

Gramscian hegemony, therefore, is the unification of base and superstructure, it is an always temporary and always contested fusion of material and ideological power in a hegemonic or historical bloc. In her analysis of Gramscian hegemony, Gwyn Williams highlights the intellectual and moral leadership (i.e. ideological) levels of hegemony. “By ‘hegemony,’” Williams states, “Gramsci seems to mean a socio-political situation, in his terminology a ‘moment’, in which the philosophy and practice of a society fuse or are in equilibrium; an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations,

³⁰ Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 182.

³¹ Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, pp. 181-182.

particularly in their intellectual and moral connotation.”³² Similarly, James Scott defines hegemony in purely ideological terms. “Hegemony is, after all, fundamentally about the misrepresentation of ‘objective’ interests,” Scott argues. “Hegemony is simply the name Gramsci gave to the process of ideological domination... [which serves] to explain the institutional basis of false consciousness.”³³ However, we must not forget that for Gramsci hegemony was both a material and an ideological relation between social forces.³⁴ He argues, “the fact of hegemony presupposes that account is taken of the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain balance of compromise should be formed – in other words that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economico-corporative kind. But there is no doubt that although hegemony is ethico-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity.”³⁵ In other words, while hegemony is the ideological construction of a shared worldview, or in Gramsci’s terms a cultural “common sense”, it is also the creation of a shared interest in the material reproduction of life. It is in these shared and common understandings between the dominant and subaltern groups that hegemony is to be based largely on consent.

³² Gwyn Williams, “The Concept of ‘egemonia’ in the thought of Antonio Gramsci,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 21:4 (1960), p. 587.

³³ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 335, 315. For an earlier iteration of the same argument, see James C. Scott, “Hegemony and the Peasantry,” *Politics and Society*, 7 (3), 1977, pp. 267-296.

³⁴ See, Femia, “Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci,” pp. 35-37.

³⁵ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 161.

For Gramsci it is this process of creating the conditions of consent of the subordinate classes that distinguishes “modern” political systems from older, “traditional” forms of rule that relied largely on coercion. The distinction between modern and traditional forms of state highlights two important aspects of hegemony. The first is that modern states are integral states, meaning there is an interwoven and reciprocal relationship between the state in its strict sense (i.e. the governmental apparatus) and civil society.³⁶ In contrast, in traditional social formations the state hovers over society and works almost purely as an apparatus of coercion to maintain the dominance of one social group over all the others. Explaining the distinction between modern and traditional forms, Gramsci argues that “in the ancient and medieval state, both politico-territorial and social centralization were minimal (the former being a function of the latter). In a certain sense, the state was a mechanical bloc of social groups, often of different races. Under the constraint and military political pressure that bore on them, and could at certain moments assume an acute form, the subaltern groups maintained a life of their own.... The modern state substitutes for the mechanical bloc of social forces their subordination to the active hegemony of the leading and dominant group. It abolishes certain forms of autonomy, which are reborn in other forms: parties, trade unions, cultural organizations.”³⁷ Elsewhere Gramsci notes, “in Russia [i.e. a traditional social

³⁶ According to Gramsci, “the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its domination, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules.” Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 244. For an extended discussion of the integral state, see Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, pp. 91-110, 282-94.

³⁷ Antonio Gramsci quoted in Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, p. 274.

formation] the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West [i.e. modern social formations] there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks.”³⁸

The second conclusion to be drawn here is that it is only with the advent of modern, Western social formations that hegemony becomes a form of politics. As Thomas notes, Gramscian hegemony “is a particular practice of consolidating social forces and condensing them into political power on a mass basis – the mode of production of the modern ‘political’.”³⁹ The advent of the modern political is at the same time the advent of the modern form of the nation-state and it is therefore the control of the state that is the centerpiece of any Gramscian notion of hegemony. Discussing the Jacobins during the French Revolution, Gramsci claims “not only did they organise a bourgeois government, i.e. make the bourgeoisie the dominant class – they did more. They created the bourgeois State, made the bourgeoisie into the leading, hegemonic class of the nation, in other words gave the new State a permanent basis and created the compact modern French nation.”⁴⁰ In a later note discussing the bourgeois state in general terms, Gramsci argues “the revolution which the bourgeois class has brought into the conception of law, and hence into the function of the State, consists especially in the will to conform.... The previous ruling

³⁸ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 238.

³⁹ Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, p. 194.

⁴⁰ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 79.

classes were essentially conservative in the sense that they did not tend to construct an organic passage from the other classes into their own, i.e. to enlarge their class sphere 'technically' and ideologically: their conception was that of a closed caste. The bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level. The entire function of the State has been transformed; the State has become an 'educator', etc."⁴¹ What is more, only with the foundation of the modern state are the masses organized politically and economically through parties, trade unions, etc. This organization of the masses "objectively reflects the fact that a new social force has been constituted, and has a weight which can no longer be ignored."⁴² In other words, the new relationship between state and society represents the potential of the masses to intervene in politics.

For Gramsci it is the state in its integral sense that maintains the dominance and leadership of social and economic elites through the consent, both active and passive, of subordinate or subaltern classes. The state in its limited form also plays a fundamental role if and/or when the integral state cannot win consent. In the case where consent is withheld, the state resorts to outright coercion to maintain its hegemony. But, as Buci-Glucksmann points out, the more the element of force dominates, the less hegemony there will be.⁴³ Thus, the coercion of the state serves as a mostly silent backdrop underlying an imposed consensus, exposing itself only in

⁴¹ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 260.

⁴² Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 106.

⁴³ Christine Buci-Glucksmann, "Hegemony and Consent: A Political Strategy," in Anne Showstack Sassoon (ed.), *Approaches to Gramsci*, (London: Writers and Readers, 1982), p. 120.

particular periods when the intellectual and moral leadership of the ruling class is called into question outright. The apparatus of coercive state power is constituted “in anticipation of moments of crisis and command, when spontaneous consent has failed, and force openly resorted to.”⁴⁴ However, as Perry Anderson has astutely noted, it is important to understand that the very nature of the consent constructed by any hegemonic regime is predicated on the coercive power of the state, “since it is precisely the parliamentary representative State that first and foremost induces it [consent].” Anderson goes on to argue “the normal conditions of ideological subordination of the masses – the day-to-day routines of a parliamentary democracy – are themselves *constituted by* a silent, absent force which gives them their currency: the monopoly of legitimate violence by the State.”⁴⁵ Without this “silent, absent force” the structures of hegemonic control become extremely tenuous due to the fact that sanctions for failing to consent to the system ostensibly fall by the wayside.

But, as mentioned above, hegemony is not just a concept for understanding class power and its maintenance. Harking back to Lenin, Gramsci also developed the concept as a strategy of political struggle against the existing hegemonic order for the subordinate classes to achieve power. As Buci-Glucksmann argues, hegemony “is primarily a political principle and a form of strategic leadership, that is, a guide to political action.”⁴⁶ Perry Anderson’s scathing polemic against Gramsci’s reformism aside, the strategy of struggle against an existing hegemony is in essence the creation

⁴⁴ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci,” p. 31, 43.

⁴⁶ Buci-Glucksmann, “Hegemony and Consent: A Political Strategy,” pp. 116-117.

of a counter hegemony that can upend the current correlation of social forces and establish itself as the new dominant material and moral intellectual bloc in the state. To do so, however, requires an extended “war of position” throughout civil society where the counter hegemonic forces lay the basis for their leadership. As Gramsci notes, a “social group can, and indeed must, already exercise ‘leadership’ before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to ‘lead’ as well.”⁴⁷ This is the strategy to be developed in “Western” capitalist democracies, as opposed to a “war of maneuver” that topples the state through a concentrated physical and violent confrontation between forces, more appropriate to more traditional “Eastern” social formations.

However, to create this new hegemonic bloc does not mean to merely “yoke” different classes with different interests (i.e. the proletariat with the peasantry) in a temporary alliance to overthrow the existing hegemony. For Gramsci the process of aligning differing groups means a fundamental modification in any particular groups’ identity, it is the construction of a new homogenous political subject. Discussing the rigid aversion of some within the communist movement to the notion of compromise, or the necessity of the working class to cooperate and negotiate with other subordinate classes, Gramsci states

there is no understanding of the fact that mass ideological factors always lag behind mass economic phenomena, and that therefore, at certain moments, the

⁴⁷ Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, pp. 57-58.

automatic thrust due to the economic factor is slowed down, obstructed or even momentarily broken by traditional ideological elements – hence that there must be a conscious, planned struggle to ensure the exigencies of the economic position of the masses, which may conflict with the traditional leadership’s policies, are understood. An appropriate political initiative is always necessary to liberate the economic thrust from the dead weight of traditional policies – i.e. to change the political direction of certain forces which have to be absorbed if a new, homogeneous politico-economic historical bloc, without internal contradictions, is to be successfully formed.⁴⁸

Thus, for Gramsci, an intrinsic aspect of hegemonic struggle, and therefore hegemonic politics, is the construction of homogenized and unitary political subjects that, in turn, express a universal and national popular collective will to power.⁴⁹ For Gramsci, the only modern organization that is able to coalesce the diversity of identities into this new political subjectivity and challenge capitalist hegemony was the communist party, what he termed the “Modern Prince.” The modern prince, according to Gramsci, is “the first cell in which there come together germs of a collective will tending to become universal and total.... The modern Prince must be and cannot but be the proclaimer and organiser of an intellectual and moral reform, which also means creating the terrain for a subsequent development of the national-popular collective will towards the realisation of a superior, total form of modern civilisation.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the formation of the party is not a necessarily seamless, organic affair where interests and identities merge without the influence of a concrete developing and organizing force. Labeling this a “Jacobin force”, Gramsci argues

⁴⁸ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 168.

⁴⁹ For the concept of “national popular,” see Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 421, note 65.

⁵⁰ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 129, 132-133.

that it both awakens and organizes the national popular collective will while also serving as an active and operative expression of that national popular spirit both within the party itself and throughout society more generally. Furthermore, Gramsci argues, historically it has been this Jacobin force that has founded the modern States and therefore is a necessity of any particular hegemony or hegemonic politics in general.⁵¹

The modern prince in all of its functions (e.g. organization, socialization, disciplining, propagandizing, educating etc.) can thus be seen as the vanguard force of a rising socialist hegemony in construction. For, according to Gramsci, it is the political party that not only plays the decisive politico-military role in hegemonic struggle but it is also the crucial organizing and leading force of a new society. In any hegemonic struggle there are three “levels” or “moments” in the relation of social forces, of which the political party plays a fundamental role in two. The first level is the objective conditions of material production that are independent of human will, what Gramsci calls “stubborn reality.”⁵² In Marxist terms, this level relates to the economic base of any society which ultimately determines whether or not the objective conditions exist for societal transformation. A second level is the relation of military forces, or what Gramsci sometimes labels politico-military forces. Essentially, this level is an analysis of the relations of physical force between the two parties involved in hegemonic struggle. For Gramsci, the party plays a crucial role here in terms of organizing and exerting the force of the subordinate classes. Gramsci

⁵¹ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 130-133.

⁵² Gramsci, *The Modern Prince & Other Writings*, p. 169.

states that “the decisive element in every situation is the permanently organized and long-prepared force [i.e. the political party] which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favourable (and it can only be favourable only in so far as such a force exists, and is full of fighting spirit).”⁵³ A third level, which according to Gramsci mediates between the first and second, is the relation of political forces. This level is an evaluation of the degree of homogeneity, organization, and political consciousness of the conflicting social forces. It is here where we can ultimately see how the two sides of Gramscian hegemony, analytical concept and strategy, come together. It is on the level of political forces where

one becomes aware that one’s own corporate interests, in their present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of the other subordinate groups too. This the most purely political phase, and marks the decisive passage from the [economic] structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures; it is the phase in which previously germinated ideologies become ‘party’, come into confrontation and conflict, until only one of them, or at least a single combination of them, tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society – bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a ‘universal’ plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups. It is true that the State is seen as the organ of one particular group, destined to create favourable conditions for the latter’s maximum expansion. But the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the ‘national’ energies. In other words, the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the State is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interest of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups- equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group

⁵³ Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 185.

prevail, but only up to a certain point, i.e. stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interests.⁵⁴

Hegemony in Bolivia

After Gramsci's developments, the concept of hegemony became an even more useful tool of social analysis. As Perry Anderson has shown, Gramsci's ideas have been highly influential throughout the Anglophone world and his notion of hegemony has been most creatively employed by the likes of Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, Ranajit Guha, and Giovanni Arrighi.⁵⁵ Perhaps the most sophisticated attempt at reworking of the term as a form of discursive construction came in the mid 1980s with Laclau and Mouffe's seminal work, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.⁵⁶ In Latin America the concept became extremely influential in the 1960s and 70s across the region. It was taken up particularly in Argentina where a group of young

⁵⁴ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 181-182.

⁵⁵ Perry Anderson, "The Heirs of Gramsci," *New Left Review*, 100 (2016), 71-97.

⁵⁶ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, (New York: Verso Books, 1985). Laclau and Mouffe's reworking of hegemony was questioned by many and they argued that the term was emptied of its material foundations and its strategic utility. See, for instance, Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat From Class: A New "True" Socialism*, (New York: Verso, 1998), esp. Chapter 4. Meiksins Wood critiques Laclau and Mouffe for their "autonomization of ideology and politics," arguing their discursive conceptualization of hegemony disassociates working class interests from the struggle for socialism and implies "that there are no 'fixed' social interests or identities, that all social identities are discursively constructed and 'politically negotiable'". In fact, this is the proposition on which their case ultimately rests; and it entails not only the dissolution of social reality into discourse, but a denial of *history* and the logic of historical process" (61-62). Moreover, "not only is the working class no privileged agent of socialism, there are no historical conditions and no social interests conducive to the development of socialism. This means that no *other* 'social agents' exist whose collective identity, interests, and capacities might replace those of the working class as the basic materials of socialist struggle. In fact, there is no social basis for *any* kind of politics. Discourse is all" (74). In the final instance, according to Meiksins Wood, Laclau and Mouffe's reformulation of hegemony on discursive grounds "is not an analysis of contemporary society and the conditions of its transformation; it is little more than a verbal conjuring trick" (69). For a reply to some of their critics, see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, "Post-Marxism without Apologies," *New Left Review*, 166 (1987), pp. 79-106.

Marxist intellectuals publishing the magazine *Pasado y Presente* were seeking to transplant Gramsci's ideas to a specifically Latin American reality.⁵⁷

In Bolivia, two of the most influential theorists of hegemony have been René Zavaleta Mercado and Álvaro García Linera, the current vice president. Like Gramsci, Zavaleta's writings are often empirically dense, focused on specific historical conjunctures, theoretically allusive and conceptually challenging.⁵⁸ In general, Zavaleta was attempting to understand and theorize how an underdeveloped and multi-cultural society like Bolivia, what he termed a *formación abigarrada* (motley social formation), could form a common, national popular identity, which he argued was essential for becoming a modern, industrialized nation.⁵⁹ To talk of Bolivia as a *formación abigarrada* means that "there are overlapping economic stages (those of common taxonomic usage) without combining much, as if feudalism belongs to one culture and capitalism belongs to another and they nevertheless occur in the same space, as if there was one country in feudalism and another in capitalism, overlapping but not combining."⁶⁰ According to Luis Antezana, Zavaleta used the

⁵⁷ See, for instance, José María Aricó, *La cola del diablo: Itinerario de Gramsci en América Latina*, (Buenos Aires: Puntosur Editores, 1988), and Juan Carlos Portantiero, *Los usos de Gramsci*, (Buenos Aires: Grijalbo, 1999).

⁵⁸ For an fascinating and entertaining analysis of Zavaleta's thought and intellectual style, see James Dunkerley, "Bolivia en ese entonces: *Bolivia, hoy* revisitado 30 años después," *Revista Boliviana de Investigación*, 10:1 (2013), particularly 193-201.

⁵⁹ René Zavaleta Mercado, "Las Masas en Noviembre" [1983], in *Obra Completa: Tomo II*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2013), p. 102-103, 106. See also, Luis H. Antezana, "Dos conceptos en la obra de René Zavaleta Mercado: Formación abigarrada y democracia como autodeterminación," in León Olivé et al, *Pluralismo epistemológico*, (La Paz: Muela del Diablo Editores, 2009), p. 122.

⁶⁰ Zavaleta, "Las Masas en Noviembre" p. 105. James Dunkerley usefully compares Zavaleta's *formación abigarrada* with Ernst Bloch's "die Ungleichzeitigkeit der Gleichzeitigen," or "the non-simultaneity of the simultaneous." Bloch explains "Not all people exist in the same Now. They do externally, by virtue of the fact that they are living at the same time with others. Rather, they carry earlier things with them, things which are intricately involved. One has one's times according to

notion of “formación abigarrada” along the lines of other similar concepts such as “mode of production”, “social formation”, and “historic bloc”. However, whereas the latter concepts sought to define the determined relationship between economic production and socio-political reproduction in any society, the former was intended to highlight the ways in which different economic, political, and cultural forms exist within the same national geographic territory without much interrelation.⁶¹ Although more recently Zavaleta’s notion of formación abigarrada has been taken up in a positive sense for understanding Bolivia’s subaltern social forces,⁶² Zavaleta argued that while Bolivia’s motley social formation made its trajectory of social change unique it was still necessary to be overcome in order to escape its “backward,” dependent position. But, Bolivia has historically lacked the presence of a dominant class that could construct a historic bloc around which a state-led hegemony could be built.⁶³ On the one hand, the dominant feudal classes, what Zavaleta sometimes calls the *casta señorial*, have historically lacked the ideological vision and material power

where one stands corporeally, above all in terms of classes. Times older than the present continue to effect older strata...”. See, Ernst Bloch, “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics,” *New German Critique*, 11 (1977), p. 22. For the Zavaleta – Bloch comparison, see Dunkerley, “Bolivia en ese entonces: *Bolivia, hoy revisitado 30 años después*,” pp. 210-211.

⁶¹ Antezana, “Dos conceptos en la obra de René Zavaleta Mercado,” p. 131.

⁶² See, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 393-413; Álvaro García Linera, Luis Tapia, Toni Negri, Michael Hardt, Giuseppe Cocco, Judith Revel, *Imperio, multitud y sociedad abigarrada*, (La Paz: Muela del Diablo, 2008).

⁶³ For a similar argument using a Zavaletan analysis, see Luis Tapia, *La hegemonía imposible*, (La Paz: Autodeterminación, 2015). While Tapia has analyzed the work of Zavaleta more than most (he wrote his dissertation and a book on the thought of Zavaleta). See, Luis Tapia, *La producción del conocimiento local: Historia y política en la obra de René Zavaleta*, (La Paz: Muela del Diablo Editores, 2002)), it is unclear in *La hegemonía imposible* why, in fact, it has been impossible to form a hegemony in Bolivia. Tapia does not clarify whether the failure to construct a hegemonic bloc with the power to lead is due to an objective, structural barrier with a basis in Bolivia’s particular social formation, the subjective inability of a particular social group to incorporate dominated social groups into its universal project, or simply the outright impossibility of creating a truly hegemonic state in general terms.

to transform itself into a modern bourgeoisie and consolidate a national political and economic order under its “universal” direction and leadership. On the other hand, the rural indigenous campesinos, miners, and urban working classes have also been incapable of forming their own hegemonic project [*alcance*].⁶⁴ Part of this failure to construct a hegemonic bloc in Bolivia is due to the inability to form a national popular identity. That is, dominant groups have historically failed to combine an institutionalized form of political democracy with “the level of equality that men [sic] have... in their carnality, in their social consumption and in their daily lives.”⁶⁵

Taking the idea of the national popular from Gramsci, Zavaleta defined it as “the relationship between what Weber called social democratization and the form of the state.”⁶⁶ Zavaleta was interested in how the material relations of production related to and underpinned any specific form of political domination in order to strategically theorize how a process of national popular and socialist transformation might come about. Here, Zavaleta’s conceptualization of the state and the process of its transformation are important. Highlighting the link between sovereignty and state power, he notes “the idea of the unity of power is connatural to the modern State, although this does not mean that the concentration of power will always be an organic unity. The historical idea of the unity of power corresponds to the notions of

⁶⁴ René Zavaleta Mercado, “La burguesía incompleta,” in *Clases sociales y conocimiento*, (La Paz: Los Amigos del Libro, 1988); idem, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2008 [1986]), p. 14; idem, “Las Masas en Noviembre,” p. 132.

⁶⁵ Zavaleta, “Las Masas en Noviembre,” p. 124.

⁶⁶ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, p. 9. According to Tapia, social democratization in this sense “refers to the processes of growing socio-economic equality and integration that is generating the modernization of the reorganized economy following the criteria of formal rationality and capitalism.” See, Tapia, *La producción del conocimiento local*, p. 193.

sovereignty and the irresistibility of legitimate power, although strictly speaking, legitimate power is that that can impose itself by its own will. The proper independence or autonomy of the State is related to the idea of unity. *There is no autonomy where there is no unity.*⁶⁷ Thus, theoretically speaking, a proper state is one that is unified materially and ideologically under the domination and leadership of a hegemonic group and it is the process of this unification that has been the historical construction of all contemporary nation states. Similar to Marx's argument in *The German Ideology* that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.... The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas," Zavaleta claims that "when a dominant class produces ideas that can not be metabolized as civil society's own ideas, as the natural way of things, we are facing a self-righteous State.... In order to be durable, a dominant group has to incorporate a certain amount of the dominated group's own interests."⁶⁸ Zavaleta is here claiming

⁶⁷ René Zavaleta Mercado, "El Poder Dual en América Latina" [1973], in *Obra Completa: Tomo I*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2011), p. 377. It should be noted here that this idea of the state comes from one of Zavaleta's most purely Marxist works. Zavaleta's thought is typically segmented into three defined periods, the first of which stretches from the late 1950s to the late 1960s where Zavaleta was primarily "nationalist" and is most clearly articulated in *Bolivia: El desarrollo de lo conciencia nacional* [1967]. The second period, where his work has been analyzed as "orthodox Marxism," culminates with the publication of *El Poder Dual en América Latina* in 1973/74. The final decade of Zavaleta's life is characterized as a period of "critical Marxism" and is seen in *Las Masas en Noviembre* in 1983 and, posthumously in 1986 with *Lo nacional popular en Bolivia*. See Antezana, "Dos conceptos en la obra de René Zavaleta Mercado." However, while Zavaleta's ideas and analyses certainly changed over the years, his theory of the state as a class unity of power over subordinate groups remained fairly stable despite the fact that later on he increasingly incorporated ideological and cultural aspects into his ideas on the relationship between state and society.

⁶⁸ Karl Marx, "The German Ideology: Part I," in Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 172-173. Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, p. 149.

that “the modern State” during periods of hegemony reflects the unification of material and ideological power in society.

Important to note is the distinction Zavaleta makes between what he labels an “apparent state” and a “national state.”⁶⁹ The former is a state that maintains an “inorganic relation” with a significant part of society, or where the cartographic area of the state does not correspond to its effective reach.⁷⁰ An apparent state is an “incomplete state” or a “partial state” that fails to form a relational correspondence with civil society, what Zavaleta refers to as a failed social optimum.⁷¹ A national state, on the other hand, is one where “civil society has turned into a nation and has one center of political power, or that is to say that a national state is something like the culmination of the nation.”⁷²

But, what is the nation? For Zavaleta there are clearly multiple types of nations, but the idea of the *modern* nation is tied to the expansion of capitalism and its attendant disorganization and destruction of previously existing forms of communal life. This does not simply mean the expansion of the market economy, enclosure of the commons, the increasing commodification of social life, or any other process of material transformation. These are no doubt important, but these material transformations must also be accompanied by a moral and intellectual reform that works to create a new intersubjective national identity whereby individuals see

⁶⁹ Zavaleta’s notion of *el estado nacional* is similar to Gramsci’s concept of an integral or extended state discussed above on page 11.

⁷⁰ See Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*,; Idem “Cuatro conceptos de democracia,”

⁷¹ Tapia, *La producción del conocimiento local*, p. 196; Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, p. 48.

⁷² René Zavaleta Mercado, “Notas sobre la cuestión nacional en América Latina” [1981], in *Obra Completa: Tomo II*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2013), p. 539.

themselves as part of an “imagined community” that corresponds to a common internal market and a unified political system of authority. The nation (and the nation state) is “the paradigmatic collective organizational form under the capitalist mode of production,” which involves “the construction of a collective self” and “is an indicator of the level of correspondence between the mode of production and the social collective.”⁷³ But, while the expansion of capitalism is seen as a somewhat objective historical process, the construction of national intersubjectivity occurs through specific constitutive moments, particularly in conditions of *abigarramiento*. Zavaleta theorizes these nationally constitutive moments in Bolivia as specific historical moments of crisis, such as the 1899 Federal War, and the 1952 National Revolution, amongst others. On both a methodological and ontological level, periods of general crisis “are the classic form of revelation or recognition of the reality of the social totality,” crisis “not only reveals what is national in Bolivia, but is at the same time a nationalizing event.”⁷⁴ Thus, in peripheral, motley societies it is really during periods of crisis when a collective consciousness, a national intersubjectivity is produced: “you belong to one mode of production and I belong to another, but neither you nor I are the same after the Battle of Nanawa; Nanawa is what you and I have in common.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Zavaleta, “Notas sobre la cuestión nacional en América Latina,” pp. 538-539.

⁷⁴ Zavaleta, “Las Masas en Noviembre,” pp. 105, 106. For specific methodological reasons for why crisis is essential for understanding *sociedades abigarradas*, see Roberto Laserna, “Bolivia: crisis de Estado. Una entrevista inédita con René Zavaleta Mercado,” *Estudios Sociológicos* 3:9, (1985), pp. 550-551.

⁷⁵ Zavaleta, “Las Masas en Noviembre,” p. 106-107. The Battle of Nanawa took place during the Chaco War (1932-1935) between Bolivia and Paraguay. According to Zavaleta, the Chaco War as a

We are now in a position to understand the significance of Zavaleta's conceptualization of the national popular. It is, in essence, the construction of a collective national consciousness with a popular class content, the desire for an optimal or direct correspondence between the Bolivian state and society. In other words, Zavaleta is articulating the creation of a new historical bloc and hegemonic order under the direction and leadership of the working class (particularly the Bolivian miners who were always the strategic center of any working class movement for Zavaleta).⁷⁶ He argues, "the working class is not just the most advanced class in civil society, but, on the whole, it has hegemony over civil society."⁷⁷ But, apart from the constitutive moments of crisis, the question remains of how a national popular hegemony actually becomes hegemonic.

To understand how certain social groups construct historic blocs and become hegemonic, Zavaleta turns to Gramsci's famous passage (quoted above on page 12) that in the East civil society was primordial and gelatinous, while in the West there

constitutive moment of crisis was "where Bolivia was to ask itself what it was made of," and was also "the point of departure for modern Bolivia" (Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, p. 181).

⁷⁶ It should be noted here that while Zavaleta used the term "clase obrera," it was often applied somewhat ambivalently. Luis Antezana notes that Zavaleta "felt uncomfortable with the traditional concept of class to characterize the mining proletariat as a 'working class'... finally replacing it with the concept of 'the masses'" (Cited in Dunkerley, "Bolivia en ese entonces: *Bolivia, hoy* revisitado 30 años después," p. 205). In an interview, Zavaleta stated "it is obvious that when referring to the working class we refer to it as the leader [caudillo] of civil society, of the other classes." (Laserna, "Bolivia: crisis de Estado. Una entrevista inédita con René Zavaleta Mercado," p. 554). Perhaps it is useful to think about Zavaleta's employment of "clase obrera" as similar to the way Étienne Balibar discusses Marx's use of the term "proletariat": "In reality, the concept of the proletariat is not so much that of a particular 'class', isolated from the whole of society, as of a *non-class*, the formation of which immediately precedes the dissolution of all classes and primes the revolutionary process. For this reason, when speaking of it, Marx employs, for preference, the term '*Masse*' ('mass' or 'masses'), which he turns round against the contemptuous use made of it by bourgeois intellectuals in his day (*The Philosophy of Marx*, (New York: Verso Books, 2017), p. 54).

⁷⁷ Laserna, "Bolivia: crisis de Estado. Una entrevista inédita con René Zavaleta Mercado," p. 554

was a proper relation between the state and civil society and the state was only an outer ditch of the fortifications of civil society.⁷⁸ Whereas the quote implies that a direct war of maneuver to overturn the state is applicable in peripheral, precapitalist societies due to their less complex stage of development, in developed capitalist societies a prolonged war of position throughout the trenches of civil society is the necessary strategy for countering hegemony. Zavaleta flips this around and argues that peripheral, precapitalist societies are actually more complex than capitalist societies due to their heterogeneity and lack of state-society correspondence, or, in other words, because of their *abigarramiento*. He argues that while it is true that capitalism transforms social life and makes certain things more complex, it also homogenizes and standardizes society. From this point of view, precapitalist societies maintain a sense of plurality and illegibility. “After all, social classes... those large, relatively uniform social units are borne out of capitalism and, in this sense, any backward society is more motley and complex than a capitalist society.”⁷⁹ This heterogeneity, in turn, makes radical economic, political, and social transformation a specific process unto each country, but also makes it significantly more complex in “backward” societies. In this instance, *abigarramiento* can serve as an element of resistance against the capitalist homogenization. However, at the same time, it can also act as a hindrance to the development of socialism. Thus, it is the construction of a national popular intersubjectivity that serves as a unifying essence amongst difference. Moreover, it is a period of systemic state crisis that makes

⁷⁸ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 238.

⁷⁹ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, p. 50.

possible certain class alliances (i.e. hegemony) that form a national popular intersubjectivity that would not normally be viable.⁸⁰

At least early on in his career, it is the concept of dual power that explains how hegemonic change occurs for Zavaleta. Drawing on Lenin and Trotsky, he argues in a general theoretical sense it is the rise of a counter-hegemonic social bloc against the state, which is an inherent part of the duality of power, that splits the power of the state, and thus society, into two irreconcilable camps. But, for Zavaleta the situation of dual power was really the concrete political condition of Bolivia's *abigarramiento* where multiple types of social relations and historical times exist side-by-side. He states, "The duality of power consists of that which should occur successively nevertheless occurs in a parallel manner... it is the contemporaneity of that which came before and that which should come after [lo anterior y lo posterior]."⁸¹ Nevertheless, when a revolutionary situation of dual power arises, the crisis only increases the instability of state power already inherent in Bolivia's *estado abigarrado*, which is by definition an apparent state.⁸² But, if society and the state are in a condition of *abigarramiento*, does that not make impossible the very idea of dual power, that there are (only) two distinct social power blocs vying for control of a unified state apparatus? Perhaps, but as Zavaleta moved away from his more orthodox Marxism his analyses shifted away from the idea of direct correspondence between base and superstructure toward a more critical phase of analyzing the link

⁸⁰ Zavaleta, "El Poder Dual en América Latina," p. 410.

⁸¹ Zavaleta, "El Poder Dual en América Latina," p. 379.

⁸² Zavaleta, "El Poder Dual en América Latina," p. 410; Tapia, *La producción del conocimiento local*, pp. 308-309.

between the economy and society in order to theorize the actual concrete work of constructing a counter-hegemonic national popular bloc. For Zavaleta, a situation of abigarramiento was an obstruction to the creation of a national hegemonic state, in either its capitalist or popular socialist variant. Motley, heterogeneous societies like Bolivia, Tapia maintains, “are characterized by having a more or less apparent state and a diversity of cultural communities and modes of production, but they are also societies where the processes of national construction, at the cultural level and above all at the level of politics, are inconclusive or partial processes.”⁸³ Thus, the goal was through processes of struggle accentuated by periods of crisis to create an intersubjective national popular historic bloc that could then implement a hegemonic order under its direction and leadership. And, for Zavaleta, this historic bloc would be composed largely of the indigenous and campesino masses, but undoubtedly led and directed by the mining proletariat. Discussing the class alliance of the Popular Assembly in 1971, Zavaleta stated, “it was quite correct to lay down that there should be a working class majority, a qualitative superiority over the peasantry who are a bureaucratic and dependent class inflexibly stuck to the bourgeois-democratic acquisition of land.”⁸⁴ In addition, he noted in *Las Masas de Noviembre* that “there can be no doubt that the masses have been constituted by proletarian interpellation,”

⁸³ Tapia, *La producción del conocimiento local*, p. 310.

⁸⁴ René Zavaleta, “Bolivia – Military Nationalism and the Popular Assembly,” *New Left Review*, 73 May-June, 1972, p. 70.

and “what qualifies a project as democratic or not... is the opinion or reception of the proletariat.”⁸⁵

Overall, Zavaleta’s contribution to social theory for and from the concrete historical situation of Bolivia has undoubtedly been highly influential. Although his analyses did not always specifically develop or define the concept of hegemony, he most certainly relied on Gramsci’s lexicon while similarly attempting to understand and theorize the elemental aspects of hegemonic struggle and change.⁸⁶ But, what is most important to note for our purposes is the connection Zavaleta makes between the nation and the state for his vision of social transformation. If the state is the ultimate culmination of the nation, the construction of a national popular historic bloc and processes of hegemonic struggle hinge on the territorial structure of power that is the state. In this sense, Zavaleta’s analysis of hegemony and change is nation state-centric. “The strategic aim must be to take power,” Zavaleta argues, “and it is a waste of time to talk of power, organization, or anything else, if you are unable to seize the historical initiative.”⁸⁷

Like Zavaleta, Bolivian vice president Alvaro García Linera maintains that Bolivia is a motley social formation, although, drawing on the work of Norbert Elias, he theorizes this heterogeneity in terms of several overlapping civilizational systems. According to Elias, civilization refers to a process of pacification to which human

⁸⁵ Zavaleta, “Las Masas en Noviembre,” pp. 109, 133.

⁸⁶ For example, he stated hegemony is nothing more than “the atmosphere that is between men [sic] in the midst of production,” and “The measure of hegemony, that is its optimum, consists of the ability of contradictions to be absorbed by it.” See, René Zavaleta Mercado, “Las Formaciones Aparentes en Marx” [1978], in *Obra Completa: Tomo II*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2013), p. 435; idem, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, p. 195.

⁸⁷ Zavaleta, “Bolivia – Military Nationalism and the Popular Assembly,” p. 67.

beings are subject through techniques of state formation and the internalization of a certain consciousness. In other words, the construction of civilizations can be understood as processes of hegemony formation, where the coercion, exploitation, and extraction of surplus by certain groups in society over others increasingly forgoes the outright use of physical force and increasingly relies more on the manufacturing of consent.⁸⁸ For García Linera, “Bolivia is a country where various civilizations coexist in a disarticulated way, but where the state only recognizes the organizational logic of one of these civilizations, modern market capitalism.”⁸⁹ Apart from the modern capitalist civilization, Bolivia is composed of three others: the domestic, artisan, and peasant regime organized around “simple market activity”; a communal civilization based on “the strength of the masses, the management of family and communal land and the fusion between economic and political activity”; and, finally, the Amazonian civilization “based on the itinerant nature of productive activity... and the absence of the state.”⁹⁰ This multi-civilizational structure has impeded the formation of hegemony due to the fact that the state’s legitimacy has permanently been in doubt due to its mono-ethnic presentation, or in other words, a lack of correspondence between state and society. According to García Linera, in culturally and politically homogenous nationalized societies the state as a sovereign entity is viewed as a legitimate expression of the historical synthesis of society. However, in

⁸⁸ Norbert Elias, “Power and Civilization,” *Journal of Power*, 1:2 2008, pp. 135-142.

⁸⁹ Álvaro García Linera, “Autonomías indígenas y Estado multinacional,” in *La potencia plebeya: Acción colectiva e identidades indígenas, obreras y populares en Bolivia*, (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2008), p. 230. A number of chapters from *La potencia plebeya* have been reproduced in English under the title *Plebian Power: Collective Action and Indigenous, Working-Class, and Popular Identities in Bolivia*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).

⁹⁰ García Linera, “Autonomías indígenas y Estado multinacional,” pp. 233-234.

heterogeneous societies like Bolivia, “the state is not a source of hegemony, in large part due to the fact that it has not been able to generate shared beliefs and behaviors that establish a basic principle of accepted sovereignty.”⁹¹ Thus, if the relationship between state and society in Bolivia is one of non-correspondence and state power is based almost exclusively on discrimination, coercion, and exploitation then the question becomes one of transforming this incongruent state-society relation.

How does García Linera theorize this process of transforming Bolivia’s social, economic, and political reality from its contemporary capitalist form toward what he calls the communist horizon? The answer to this question depends to a significant degree on what period of time in his intellectual development we look to.⁹² In his earlier years, particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s when he was attempting to foment an armed indigenous uprising against the state as a member of the *Ejercito Guerrillero Tupak Katari* and was writing under the *nom de plumme* Qhanachiri,⁹³ García Linera’s intellectual trajectory was autonomist and anti-statist. For example, in the opening to his 1995 *Forma valor y forma comunidad* he and Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar stated

It is necessary to abandon, once and for all, the vulgar idea of the ‘conquest of power’ that has resulted in the occupation of an alien power, and later an alien property and alien organization by an enlightened elite who became the administrator of that power, that property, and that organization foreign to society. What needs to be recognized is that society builds its own power to

⁹¹ García Linera, “Autonomías indígenas y Estado multinacional,” p. 236.

⁹² An overview of the different stages in the thought of García Linera’s can be found in Pablo Stefanoni, “Prefacio,” in Álvaro García Linera, *La potencia plebeya: Acción colectiva e identidades indígenas, obreras y populares en Bolivia*, (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2008), pp. 9-22; and Bruno Bosteels, “Puede pensarse hoy la actualidad del comunismo? Reflexiones en torno al pensamieto teórico de Álvaro García Linera,” *Revista Boliviana de Investigación*, 10:1 2013, pp. 293-323.

⁹³ Aymara for “the one who knows/clarifies things”.

emancipate itself from the prevailing private power and establish the power of society as the only form of power throughout society. If society does not construct its power itself (from the most minute capillary level to the global and fundamental level), emancipation is a supplanting farce.⁹⁴

Or, in *De demonios escondidos y momentos de revolución* from 1991, he argued

In more than one hundred years the State has not been capable of producing society as an organic totality, much less of revolutionizing it; the highest moments of social organization and reform as a nation... are tied, on the contrary, to large movements of mass insurgency, to the self organization of society against the State, to the deployment of the organizational and revolutionary vitality of society facing the State; outside of this, and despite the attempts from above, the construction of the nation and social reform has been nothing but a señorial, oligarchic, and landowner fiction.”⁹⁵

Compare these radically autonomist declarations to a more linear, stagist, and statist vision of revolution and social change formulated in 2007 after García Linera had joined the MAS and become vice president to Evo Morales:

In the mobilizations [beginning in 2000] an enormous communitarian potential had accumulated, an enormous universalist potential, an enormous autonomist potential. The moments when I saw the greatest possibility for autonomism, self-management and communism were the moments before the social mobilization. When the mobilizations began we saw their enormous potential but we also saw very clearly the limitations that were developing. I remember that, from 2002, we had a much clearer reading of the situation and talked about the character of the revolution as democratic and decolonizing. And we said: we do not yet see communism. Through our teaching, we saw the possibility of communism through a strong, self-organized workers movement that does not exist today, and that, in any case, could begin to emerge in twenty or thirty years.... The 1990s produced a total reconfiguration of the working class condition that completely disorganized everything from before and left tiny dispersed and fragmented nuclei of working class identity and the capacity to self-organize. In the indigenous

⁹⁴ Álvaro García Linera and Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, “A manera de introducción,” in García Linera, *Forma valor y forma comunidad: Aproximación teórica-abstracta a los fundamentos civilizatorios que preceden al Ayllu Universal*, (La Paz: Muela del Diablo/CLACSO, 2009), pp. 18-19.

⁹⁵ García Linera, *De demonios escondidos y momentos de revolución: Marx y la revolución social en las extremidades del cuerpo capitalista*, (La Paz: Ofensiva Roja, 1991), p. 255, quoted in Bosteels, “Puede pensarse hoy la actualidad del comunismo?” p. 323.

peasant world we saw enormous vitality in terms of political transformation, achievements in equality, but also an enormous limitation and lack of possibilities for communitarian forms of management and production of wealth.

He continued:

Well, how to interpret all of this? The general horizon of the period is communist. And this communism will have to be constructed from the self-organizing capacities of society, from the processes of generating and distributing communitarian wealth through self-management. But, at this moment it is clear that it is not an immediate horizon, now we are focused on achieving equality, the redistribution of wealth, and the expansion of rights. Equality is fundamental because it breaks a chain of five centuries of structural inequality, this is the objective of the moment, until the time comes when the social forces are ready, not because we prescribed it like that but because we see it as such. To be more precise, we began looking at the movement with hopeful eyes and desires for the communist horizon. But, we were serious and objective, in the social sense of the term, to point out the limitations of the movement... When I entered the government I began to operate from the position of the state from this reading of the current situation. So, where does this leave communism? What can be done from the State to support the communist horizon? A leftist State, a revolutionary State, can help deploy as much as possible the autonomous organizing capacities of society. Extend the base of the working class and the autonomy of the world of labor, strengthen the communitarian forms of economy where there are communitarian networks, articulations, and projects. Without controlling them. There are no processes of cooptation nor creation from above in communitarianism. That we will never do.”⁹⁶

Highlighting the transformation in García Linera’s thinking is not meant as a critique to claim that the power incurred from his participation in government has somehow seduced him away from his earlier, more radical thinking and practice. This may or may not have been the case.⁹⁷ Rather, the point is to draw attention to the complexity

⁹⁶ Álvaro García Linera, quoted in Stefanoni, “Prefacio,” in *La potencia plebeya*, pp. 20-21.

⁹⁷ This type of critique has certainly been leveled at García Linera. Yet, as Bruno Bosteels points out, many critiques of this nature oftentimes show very little knowledge or understanding of the breadth and sophistication of García Linera’s work (Bosteels, “Puede pensar hoy la actualidad del comunismo?” p. 318, n. 31). And, as James Dunkerly notes, this type of criticism “is a complete boon for commentators. Intellectuals who occupy public office are unusual prey to charges of hypocrisy as

of his thinking and also clarify that his answers to certain questions (e.g. Who are the historical subjects of revolutionary change? What is the best revolutionary strategy? What is the relationship between revolution and the state? What is the ultimate goal of revolutionary struggle? etc.) are, like Gramsci and Zavaleta, not always clearly cut and dried, which at times makes it difficult to neatly situate García Linera ideologically.

Nevertheless, a continuous thread running through most of García Linera's thought is the attempt to understand the relationship between class, ethnicity, and the state. Seeking to apprehend the often complex and contradictory relation between class and ethnicity was, for García Linera, the great struggle to bring Marxism and *Indianismo* together in the specific situation of Bolivia, which he sought to do largely through engaging the work of Zavaleta Mercado (who we discussed above) and Fausto Reinaga (who we shall discuss below). Through his work, García Linera aimed to create "a space of communication and mutual enrichment between Indianisms and Marxisms, which are likely to be the most important emancipatory conceptions in Bolivian society in the 21st century."⁹⁸ By combining these two theories of emancipation, Bolivia's indigenous and working class peoples would be

they scale speedily down from the heights where theory and sheer high-mindedness inevitably locate them, but apart from the tell-tale loquaciousness of the guild, they bequeath plenty of evidence of 'where they come from'" (James Dunkerley, "Evo Morales, the 'Two Bolivias' and the Third Bolivian Revolution," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 39:1, (2007), p. 145. However, it should also be noted that there are a number of polemics between García Linera and some of his former comrades in *Grupo Comuna* that are more historically informed, but are nevertheless sometimes overlaid with personal animosity.

⁹⁸ Álvaro García Linera, "Indianismo y marxismo. El desencuentro de dos razones revolucionarias," in *La potencia plebeya*, p. 392.

able to put forth a new, unified vision of the Bolivian state, one with the possibility of a proper correspondence between state power and societal composition.

In order to define class in an open and critical manner that matches with Bolivian reality, García Linera pushes back against those who might define it simply as an objective, static property relation between those who own the means of production and those who do not. Simply to explain social classes through the relations of property, he argues, “is to invert and mystify the problematic of classes, taking as the origin that which in a strict sense is the result, a radical critique of the social division of classes is substituted by a juridical critique of forms of property.”⁹⁹ In reality, forms of property do not precede the conflicts between social classes in society. Rather, they are that struggle’s authentication and are crystallized in the laws, codes, and regulations that underpin the capitalist relations of property.¹⁰⁰ For García Linera, particularly in places like Bolivia where there are important communal social structures that largely define themselves in relation to a burdensome state (despotic, colonial, or capitalist), these communities define themselves as a class due to the fact that their “conditions of life, consistent economic ties, cultural and political attitudes, their field of possibilities” are distinct from and subordinate to “the field of material possibilities of the holders of prevailing state power, the dominant economic activity, and the legitimate culture.” He continues, “the members of a community, in

⁹⁹ Álvaro García Linera, “El *Manifiesto comunista* y nuestro tiempo,” in *La potencia plebeya*, p. 95. This work was originally published in Álvaro García Linera et al., *El fantasma insomne: Pensando el presente desde el Manifiesto Comunista* (La Paz: Muela del Diablo, 1999). All citations here are from the version reproduced in *La potencia plebeya*.

¹⁰⁰ García Linera, “El *Manifiesto comunista* y nuestro tiempo,” p. 94.

any of its forms, due to their ineluctable links in the face of greater and dominant social structures are, therefore, a social class; and the forms of going forward and challenging these links by economically, politically, and culturally dominant society will do no more than consecrate this, their class position.”¹⁰¹

We can see a similarity with Zavaleta here in the way García Linera is attempting to open up the concept of class, and this is done for two specific reasons. One is the historical period in which these ideas were being put forward, a time in which García Linera and his comrades in *Grupo Comuna* were seeing a theoretical crisis within Bolivian Marxism (if not Marxism globally) in understanding and dealing with the triumph of neoliberal capitalism and its attendant weakening of Bolivia’s working classes and their radical unionism. For García Linera, what needed to be done was a rearticulation of Marxist analysis and its revitalization through new critical approaches and proposals, albeit maintaining a focus on the material reproduction of life through the category of class. The second reason relates to the historical inability of certain orthodox sectors of Marxism to capture the meaning of ethnic identity in analyzing Bolivia’s complex and heterogeneous social structure. This failure had a particularly pronounced effect in Bolivia where many indigenous activists argued that Marxism was simply another imported Western philosophy that only served to subordinate and recolonize indigenous peoples.¹⁰² Reconceptualizing

¹⁰¹ García Linera, “El *Manifiesto comunista* y nuestro tiempo,” p. 90.

¹⁰² See Patrick Dove, “The *Desencuentros* of History: Class and Ethnicity in Bolivia,” *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 56:3 (2015), pp. 313-332. Perhaps the most explicit and well known example of this critical indigenismo is Fausto Reinaga, *La revolución india*. For more contemporary arguments along similar lines, see Felipe Quispe, *Túpak Katari: vuelve y vive... carajo!*, (La Paz: Ofensiva Roja, 1990); and Ayar Quispe, XXXX.

as García Linera does opens up the possibility of thinking class in relational terms, not just between capital and proletariat but rather between those who have politico-economic-cultural capital and those who do not. Additionally, this notion of class is understood as a process that is always in construction and is formed through social struggle. García Linera argues that the concept of struggle precedes that of classes and notes, “it is because there are struggles between social subjects that classes later develop, it is not a coincidence that in the *Communist Manifesto* Marx first talks of class struggle and only later of the classes that form part of the struggle.”¹⁰³ Thus, due to the particular concrete history of Bolivia, social classes have been constructed alongside and through indigenous ethnic identity, “social classes have been built ethnically, or, if you prefer, there is an ethnic dimension of social class.”¹⁰⁴

It is this stretching of the category of class that allows García Linera to redefine the historical subject of revolutionary hegemonic change after the downfall of revolutionary nationalism and the “State of ‘52” with the onset of neoliberalism in the mid-1980s.¹⁰⁵ Whereas Bolivia’s mining proletariat was to be the vanguard in the country’s subaltern counter-hegemonic class alliance during the twentieth century, after the triumph of neoliberalism and its disorganization and fragmentation of state-capitalist schemes of work Bolivia’s subaltern classes would henceforth congeal in various ways depending on the specific conjuncture. The economic and political

¹⁰³ García Linera, “El *Manifiesto comunista* y nuestro tiempo,” p. 98.

¹⁰⁴ Álvaro García Linera, “El movimiento de los movimientos,” in Álvaro García Linera et al., *Imperio, multitude y sociedad abigarrada*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁵ See Álvaro García Linera, “La muerte de la condición obrera del siglo XX,” in *La potencia plebeya*, pp. 162-192.

importance of mining and miners' union activity has waned and therefore the mining proletariat is no longer seen as the central driving social force of history. Instead, what has taken its place is a flexible form of organized resistance that coalesces around various struggles without an exclusive hegemonic leader. This new historical subject is what García Linera calls the multitude and defines as "a bloc of collective action where organized autonomous structures of the subaltern classes articulate around discursive and symbolic constructions of hegemony that varies depending on their origin between distinct segments of the subaltern classes."¹⁰⁶ Important is the fact that, unlike the traditional union and its form of organization based around the workplace, the multitude lacks an explicitly defined and concentrated leadership. "At some moments the leadership of the movement is made up of coca producers, in the next moment the leadership is placed in the Aymaras, the campesinos, and in the following moment it moves to the artisans of the cities or peripheries, and in another moment it can move toward other sectors. There does not exist a [pre-defined] center of collective action, any group can form the center, depending on the circumstances."¹⁰⁷ In a sense, the multitude form is associated with the rise of and theoretical discussion around "new social movements" and was most clearly put into practice through the *Coordinadora por la Defensa del Agua y de la Vida*, the central hub around which organizing efforts took place during the Water War in 2000 in the

¹⁰⁶ Álvaro García Linera, "Sindicato, multitude y comunidad. Movimientos sociales y formas de autonomía política en Bolivia," in *La potencia plebeya*, p. 294, n. 369.

¹⁰⁷ García Linera, "El movimiento de los movimientos," pp. 60-61.

city of Cochabamba.¹⁰⁸ However, where many theorists argued that these new social movements did not aim at the conquest of state power, for García Linera the multitude has “an organizing force that is capable of putting in doubt the relevance of the existing systems of governance, the liberal democratic regime, and erecting, as of now provisionally, alternative systems of exercising political power and of legitimate democratic life.”¹⁰⁹ Yet, despite this capability of challenging the contemporary order, the neoliberal policies of that same order have constituted the multitude in such a way that it lacks a permanent organizational and material structure and is a regional rather than national phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is the multitude that has become the new revolutionary historical subject, at once borne out of Bolivia’s neoliberal regime and at the same time its gravedigger.

García Linera’s conceptualization of class moves us away from an orthodox and economistic Marxist vision and opens up the space to think about the multitude as the contemporary organized expression of Bolivia’s motley society in relation to its traditionally monocultural and monocivilizational state, the question we now must ask is how a multitudinous nation transforms or becomes the state. Or, in other words, how does *lo multitud abigarrado* transform the state-society nexus and construct a hegemony in its image? As García Linera’s theoretical production

¹⁰⁸ Although he does not cite him in this context, García Linera’s conceptualization of the multitude is similar to Laclau’s formulation of the diversity within new social movements. See, Ernesto Laclau, “New social movements and the plurality of the social,” in David Slater (ed.), *New social movements and the state in Latin America*, (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1985).

¹⁰⁹ García Linera, “Sindicato, multitude y comunidad,” p. 305.

increasingly focuses on the state, the answer to this question oscillates back and forth between an idea of hegemony of difference and hegemony over difference.¹¹⁰

García Linera's early writings on revolutionary transformation are clearly inspired by Gramsci and his strategic notion of the war of position. He argues,

The social revolution is not, then, an attack that exterminates bourgeois families, nor is it much less an administrative measure in which a little boss [jefecillo] dictates a decree of 'socialization.' It is a practical, historical movement, over an extended period of time, where labor is breaking down and eroding the social relations of force in the economy, politics, culture, and technology that sustain capital, long before the political overthrow of the bourgeoisie.... This revolutionary process is historical process that takes decades and that begins long before the open, national fight over the monopoly of physical and symbolic violence of the State.¹¹¹

Later on, he adds:

The social revolution is not a *Putsch* by a risky vanguard, nor is it a *golpe de estado* that overthrows the bad functionaries of state power for others that are more selfless, committed to or educated in the 'program'; it is a long process of social, economic, political, and cultural self-determination that initiates itself in each center of labor, in an isolated manner in various regions and countries, and it is capable of materially interconnecting practices, attitudes, and actions to create a practical sense of labor totalization that will positively overcome the totalization of capital.¹¹²

We can see that not much attention was given to the role of the state in this process of revolutionary transformation. "Gramsci was correct," García Linera states, "that before there can be electoral victories in the political sphere there must be cultural victories, ideological victories. There must be a displacement of the old 'common

¹¹⁰ On the distinction between hegemony of difference and hegemony over difference, see Gareth Williams, "Social Disjointedness and the State-Form in Álvaro García Linera," *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 56:3, 2015, pp. 297-312.

¹¹¹ García Linera, "El *Manifiesto comunista* y nuestro tiempo," pp. 102-103.

¹¹² García Linera, "El *Manifiesto comunista* y nuestro tiempo," pp. 120-121.

sense' and an irradiation of the new vision of the world. Only when all of these important battles are won can there be a transformation in the field of politics."¹¹³

However, he increasingly turns his attention to the state and its role in social revolutionary transformation as the 2000-2005 period of insurrection begins to overturn the common sense of neoliberalism in place since the mid 1980s. This focus on the state perhaps becomes even more central after he enters the government as Evo Morales's vice president. In "The State in Transition: Power Bloc and Point of Bifurcation", García Linera not only lays out his conceptualization of the state but he also schematizes the process of its transition "from one structure of political domination and legitimation to another one."¹¹⁴ The state is formulated as 1) the political correlation of social forces, 2) as an institution, and 3) as a general idea of collective belief. Drawing on Zavaleta's and Gramsci's version of the integral state while also incorporating Nico Poulantzas's idea that the state is the material condensation of the relationship of social forces, this theory of the state challenges both the instrumentalist definition of the state as a fully autonomous entity separated from society and the orthodox Marxist idea of the state as simply the determined political reflection of the dominate economic class.¹¹⁵ Here, the state is understood as the synthesis of the material and ideological struggles being waged in society and

¹¹³ Author interview, La Paz, April 4, 2015.

¹¹⁴ Álvaro García Linera, "The State in Transition: Power Bloc and Point of Bifurcation," *Latin American Perspectives*, 37:4 (2010), p. 34. Similar versions of this article were published earlier in *La potencia plebeya*, (2008), pp. 392-412; and Álvaro García Linera et al., *El Estado: Campo de lucha*, (La Paz, CLACSO, 2010). All citations here are to the English translation.

¹¹⁵ For a discussion of these various theories of the state, see René Zavaleta Mercado, XXXXX; Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, (New York: Verso, 2014 [1978]); and, Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," *The American Political Science Review*, 85:1 (1991), pp. 77-96.

they are expressed in the institutional matter of the state, that is, “where ideas materialize and have a general social effect.”¹¹⁶

Importantly, while García Linera’s definition of the state does not necessarily imply a politics of hegemony, his theory of state transition is situated squarely within the theory of hegemony and strategy of hegemonic change. According to García Linera, when the three dimensions of the state are undergoing processes of transformation in form and content we are witnessing a period of state crisis that passes through five historical stages:

1. The moment when the politically and symbolically dominant system, which has involved tolerance and even moral consensus between dominant and subjected social sectors, begins to crack, giving rise to a political dissident social bloc with an unstoppable capacity for mobilization and territorial expansion.
2. The consolidation of the dissident movement into a national political project that cannot be incorporated into the dominant order and discourse leads to a catastrophic deadlock. This development speaks to the presence not only of a political force with enough capacity for mobilization to dispute the territorial control of the dominant political bloc but also of a power project (a program, leadership, and organization with a will to state power) capable of dividing the social collective imaginary into two distinct and opposed political state structures.
3. The renovation or radical replacement of political elites, which allows the government to establish a new political bloc that takes on the responsibility of converting dissidents’ demands into state action.
4. The construction, conversion, or restoration of a political/symbolic economic power bloc, from within or on the basis of the state, which seeks to channel the ideology of the mobilized society using the material resources of the state.
5. The resolution of the crisis through a political-historical event or *bifurcation point* that consolidates a new political system or reestablishes the old one (a combination of parliamentary forces, alliances, and changing government procedures) and reconstitutes the symbolic order of state power (the ideas that guide social life).¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ García Linera, “The State in Transition: Power Bloc and Point of Bifurcation,” p. 35.

¹¹⁷ García Linera, “The State in Transition: Power Bloc and Point of Bifurcation,” pp. 36-37.

We can see that García Linera is theorizing a process of social revolution centered on a hegemonic struggle over the state. It is a struggle that divides society between two antagonistic political projects and visions of the future which begins with the deterioration of an existing hegemonic order and the rise of a unified, challenging counter-hegemonic power bloc. If these two blocs are roughly equal in material and symbolic power and neither is able to incorporate the other into its own project, the struggle can last for an extended period of time in a catastrophic deadlock, or what Gramsci calls an “equilibrium with catastrophic consequences.”¹¹⁸ However, the struggle ultimately resolves itself through the point of bifurcation where “the direct confrontation of the material, symbolic, and economic forces in conflict, without any mediating influences.”¹¹⁹ It is the moment when either the counter-hegemonic bloc withdraws its challenge or the old power bloc accepts its defeat and the triumphant power begins to “reconstruct an order that reestablishes the state structures of political domination, leadership, and administration.”¹²⁰

Elsewhere García Linera reworks the historical stages of revolution and adds an additional phase of “creative tensions” that occurs not between antagonistic and irreconcilable power blocs, as was the case during the period of state crisis, but rather within the dominant power bloc itself after the point of bifurcation, which he here

¹¹⁸ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 222.

¹¹⁹ García Linera, “The State in Transition: Power Bloc and Point of Bifurcation,” p. 47.

¹²⁰ Author interview, La Paz, April 4, 2015.

labels the “Jacobin moment of the revolution.”¹²¹ Of the five specific dialectical tensions he raises, perhaps the most important one for our purposes is the need to expand the hegemonic bloc by increasingly incorporating social sectors (i.e., bourgeoisie) that remain outside of the revolutionary alliance while making sure that the popular, indigenous, and peasant sectors maintain their vanguard position. “In all hegemonic formations,” García Linera argues, “there is a nucleus, a bloc, that is capable of presenting their ideas and interests as universal. In its capacity of creating the universal, the hegemonic bloc articulates, gathers, and leads other social groups and convinces them that its interests are in fact the universal interests of society.”¹²² Thus, in order to expand the hegemonic order and truly universalize its ideas and interests it is necessary to incorporate the adversarial social forces. But, those adversaries should not be articulated and combined with the dominant bloc as organized and unified groups, but rather in a fragmented, dispersed, and defeated fashion.¹²³ Here we again see similarities with Gramsci’s strategy for hegemony where, discussing the absorption of allied and antagonistic groups by the ruling class, he states, “political leadership becomes merely an aspect of the function of domination, in as much as the absorption of the enemies’ *élites* means their decapitation and annihilation.”¹²⁴ For García Linera, the creative tensions internal to the now-dominant national popular hegemonic bloc serve as the transformative

¹²¹ Álvaro García Linera, *La tensiones creativas de la revolución: La quinta fase del Proceso de Cambio*, (La Paz: Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional, 2010) p. 18.

¹²² Author interview, La Paz, April 4, 2015.

¹²³ Author interview, La Paz, April 4, 2015.

¹²⁴ Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 59.

impulse to move forward and continually develop the revolutionary process in Hegelian fashion where dialectical contradictions are resolved and overcome through a synthesizing process between thesis and anti-thesis. However, there can be no doubt that the ultimate outcome is in the (universal) interest of the dominant and leading hegemonic power bloc in society. Put simply, García Linera's strategic definition of hegemony is *convencer, derrotar, incorporar*.¹²⁵ By this, he meant one has to *convince* groups throughout society of one's political project in the process of constructing a counter-hegemonic power bloc, *defeat* one's organized enemies in the antagonistic struggle for power, and finally, *incorporate* them into the hegemonic power bloc not as organized social groups but in disarticulated fashion to expand the social composition of the new hegemonic order.

Hegemony, the Nation State, and Totality

So, before we move on to an exploration of plurinationality, what should we take away from this extended analysis of hegemony? There can be little doubt that the theory of hegemony as developed by Gramsci has proven to be extremely useful as both an analytic tool for social, political, and cultural analysis and as the foundation of a political strategy and practice seeking social transformation. It is also undoubtedly true that Evo Morales, García Linera, and the MAS have implemented or initiated a number of important economic, political, and cultural transformations over the past decade in Bolivia that have been beneficial for large numbers of previously

¹²⁵ Author interview, La Paz, April 4, 2015.

excluded citizens, all inspired and carried out through a vision and strategy of hegemony and hegemonic change. Without disregarding the continued reliance on extractivism, Bolivia's similar position in and interaction with the global capitalist economy, and the fact that the rhetoric of *El Proceso de Cambio* has not matched its reality, the MAS project is certainly not a return to the status quo ante. Their image of the future is at least inspired by a decolonial and communist outlook, even if that future horizon has been put off for the foreseeable future.¹²⁶

Nevertheless, I argue that the government's image of Bolivia and its future is structured by the theory of hegemony, which has specific consequences for the type and depth of change. First, despite the fact that hegemony, by definition, is always contested and never complete, it is also true that the ultimate goal of any hegemonic project is to at least attempt to control if not negate social antagonism through the creation of a complete social totality.¹²⁷ As Mouffe highlights, "every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices which attempt to disarticulate it in order to install another form of hegemony."¹²⁸ Hegemony, therefore, can be seen as an attempt to foreclose contestation, difference, and plurality in any particular social formation by a dominant group working in its

¹²⁶ For perhaps the most often cited and critiqued example of this position, see Álvaro García Linera, "El 'capitalismo andino-amazónico,'" *Le Monde diplomatique*, Chilean Edition, January 2006, at <https://www.lemondediplomatique.cl/El-capitalismo-andino-amazonico.html>.

¹²⁷ This point is highlighted through the work on post-hegemony theory. See, for instance, Benjamin Arditti, "Post-hegemony: politics outside the usual post-Marxist paradigm," *Contemporary Politics*, 13 (3), 2007, pp. 205-226; and Jon Beasley-Murray, "On Posthegemony," *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 22 (1), 2003, pp. 117-125; idem, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

¹²⁸ Chantal Mouffe, "Critique as counter-Hegemonic Intervention," Paper presented at The Art of Critique conference, Vienna, April 19-20, 2008, at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0808/mouffe/en>.

own interests. As Howson and Smith contend, “in hegemony, things do not always remain in a state of constant conflict and unresolved antagonism; rather, it is a process whereby the goal is to achieve the highest synthesis.”¹²⁹

Second, I argue that hegemony as a practice of politics is fundamentally tied up with the idea of the nation-state form and its attendant structures of centralized power and hierarchical control. In this way, hegemony is state-centric and its reproduction thus implies the state’s reproduction, albeit with the possibility of different content, if not form. As Beasley-Murray states, “the logic of hegemony simply identifies with the state by taking it for granted.”¹³⁰ But, as will be laid out below, the nation state is founded on a number of illusions that ultimately limit its epistemological and ontological utility and power. This does not mean that the nation state has ceased to exist or no longer plays an important role in politics. Instead, it is to raise the possibility that if the ideological reality and power of the nation state (not to mention its very real material power) has become limited then, in turn, the theory of hegemony also becomes limited.¹³¹

Third, the struggle for hegemony is essentially a struggle over the existing set of cultural, economic, and political ideas and institutions where the two contending power blocs essentially mirror one another in basic outline and form, if not content, in their efforts to control those already existing apparatuses. In a sense, then, “the old

¹²⁹ Richard Howson and Kylie Smith, “Hegemony and the Operation of Consensus and Coercion,” in Richard Howson and Kylie Smith (eds.), *Hegemony: Studies in Consensus and Coercion*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 10.

¹³⁰ Jon Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. xv.

¹³¹ John Beverley, “Multiculturalism and Hegemony,” in Juan Poblete (ed.), *Critical Latin American and Latino Studies*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 225.

ruling class or classes and the dominant culture will continue to win even in defeat,” argues John Beverley, because “to win hegemony subaltern classes and groups have to become essentially like that which is *already* hegemonic.”¹³² Similarly, Beasley-Murray claims “there is no counterhegemony, opposed to hegemony; it is but another version of hegemony.”¹³³ This raises questions around the possibility of alternative cultural, political, and economic forms within the limits of hegemony.

Finally, hegemony is singular in the sense that it envisions the leadership and direction of states and societies under a single, unified ideological and material image of the world. Hegemony, in its bourgeois or national popular form, is an attempt to form a universal will that either consensually incorporates or coercively obliterates understandings, interests, and knowledges that lie outside of that so-called universal construction. The modern state plays a fundamental role in this process, as Corrigan and Sayer note:

Out of the vast range of human social capacities – possible ways in which social life could be lived – state activities more or less forcibly ‘encourage’ some whilst suppressing, marginalizing, eroding, undermining others. Schooling for instance comes to stand for education, policing for order, voting for political participation. Fundamental social classifications, like age and gender, are enshrined in law, embedded in institutions, routinized in administrative procedures and symbolized in rituals of the state. Certain forms of activity are given the official seal of approval, others are situated beyond the pale. This has cumulative, and enormous, cultural consequences for how people identify ... themselves and their ‘place’ in the world.¹³⁴

¹³² Beverley, “Multiculturalism and Hegemony,” p. 224.

¹³³ Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony*, p. 22.

¹³⁴ Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution*, (New York: Blackwell, 1985), p. 4.

I am attempting to raise serious questions about the theory of hegemony and its attendant form of politics. However, this is not to argue that “there is no hegemony and never has been,” as does Beasley-Murray.¹³⁵ I do not mean to contend that the theory of hegemony does not help us understand political, economic, social, and cultural stasis and/or change, or that the struggle for hegemony fails to provide a persuasive strategy for upending the dominant system. My claims are more modest. I seek to show how the theory of hegemony is informed by and based on a particular vision of politics and, in contrast, the theory of plurinationality is informed by and based on a different vision. And, it is these differences that help us understand some important tensions and contradictions within contemporary Bolivia. With these factors in mind, I now turn to conceptualizing the theory of plurinationality. Despite the fact that proponents of plurinationality understand the history and social formation of Bolivia in similar ways to those struggling for hegemony, the idea of plurinationality represents a contending vision of the future state and society.

Plurinationality

A number of scholars, more or less assuming the particular hegemonic form of politics to be politics in general, have argued that because there has not been a complete break with capitalism and the colonial past in Bolivia since Morales and the MAS came to power in 2006, Bolivia is in the midst of a “passive revolution.”¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony*, p. ix.

¹³⁶ See, for instance, Massimo Modonesi, “Revoluciones pasivas en América Latina: Una aproximación gramsciana a la caracterización de los gobiernos progresistas de inicio del siglo,” in

This concept, again taken from Gramsci's oeuvre, denotes "the constant reorganization of state power and its relationship to society to preserve control by the few over the many, and maintain a traditional lack of real control by the mass of the population over the political and economic realms."¹³⁷ According to Webber, this process "involves changes in relation to the preceding period, but these changes are, in the end, limited to such a degree that the fundamental underlying relations of domination in society persist, even if their political expressions have been altered."¹³⁸ Thus, despite the fact that those in control of the state apparatus may have changed with the incoming MAS regime, Webber argues "little in the structural basis of the primary-export model of capital accumulation has been altered since 2006.... Instead, what is notable is a typical configuration of dependent capitalism, in which foreign capital dominates and extractive sector destined for export markets, while a layer of smaller domestic capitalists assumes a structurally subordinate position; both of these sectors, meanwhile, live off the exploitation of Bolivian laboring classes."¹³⁹ While not disagreeing with Webber about the lack of fundamental structural transformation, I would argue that, rather than a process of passive revolution, we are witnessing the functioning of hegemony, albeit in a reformed manner. This is how hegemony

Mabel Thwaites Rey (ed.), *El Estado en América Latina: Continuidades y rupturas*, (Santiago: CLACSO, 2012), pp. 139-166; Chris Hesketh and Adam David Morton, "Spaces of Uneven Development and Class Struggle in Bolivia: Transformation or *Trasformismo*?" *Antipode*, 46:1 (2014), pp. 149-169; and Jeffery R. Webber, "Bolivia's Passive Revolution," *Jacobin*, October 2015, at <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/10/morales-bolivia-chavez-castro-mas/>.

¹³⁷ Anne Showstack Sassoon, "Passive Revolution and the Politics of Reform," in Anne Showstack Sassoon (ed.), *Approaches to Gramsci*, (London: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1982), p. 129.

¹³⁸ Jeffery R. Webber, *The Last Day of Oppression, and the First Day of the Same: The Politics and Economics of the New Latin American Left*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), p. 165.

¹³⁹ Weber, *The Last Day of Oppression, and the First Day of the Same*, pp. 169, 175.

operates politically, economically, and culturally in a global capitalist system inhabited by ostensibly homogenous nation states as the defining political structure. Instead of analyzing the contradictions of the contemporary conjuncture in terms of a passive revolution whereby Morales, García Linera and the rest of the MAS leadership are seen as traitors who have turned their back on those who originally brought them to power, or as a seamless process of creative tensions pushing forward and deepening the already successful democratic and cultural revolution, I argue that it is more useful to interpret the complexities of the current period as the divergence of two contrary emancipatory projects founded on the ideas of hegemony and plurinationality.

Plurinationality has a much shorter history than does the concept of hegemony and, as a theoretical concept still in the process of construction, its definition is still open and contested. Outside of the Andes, it has been used in places such as Spain, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Belgium in order to analyze the correlation of national identity with the state, to investigate the political identity of national minorities, to examine how democracy functions in contexts of national pluralism, and to rethink the notion of national sovereignty.¹⁴⁰ In this context, plurinationality has been defined as “the coexistence within a political order of more than one national identity.... Plurinationalism is more than multinationalism, which could refer

¹⁴⁰ See Michael Keating, *Plurinational Democracy: Stateless Nations in a Post-Sovereignty Era*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Ferran Requejo and Miquel Caminal (eds.), *Political Liberalism and Plurinational Democracies*, (New York: Routledge, 2011); and, Ferran Requejo, “Revealing the dark side of traditional democracies in plurinational societies: the case of Catalonia and the Spanish ‘Estado de las Autonomías,’” *Nations and Nationalism*, 16:1 (2010), pp. 148-168.

to the coexistence of discrete and separate national groupings within a polity. Under plurinationalism, more than one national identity can pertain to a single group or even an individual, opening up the possibility of multiple nationalities which in turn may be nested or may overlap in less tidy ways.”¹⁴¹ The idea of plurinationality, it is argued, captures the more fluid and heterogeneous complexity of nationality and political order in the modern world where “the old models of statehood based on a uniform order, whether federal or unitary,” are no longer satisfactory.¹⁴²

According to Caminal, there are three central illusions of the contemporary nation state that the idea of plurinationality challenges.¹⁴³ First is the notion of absolute and indivisible sovereignty. Although the holder of sovereignty has changed over time (e.g., monarch, parliament, people), the idea of the indivisible sovereignty bounded by the nation state form has remained. The second fallacy is the equivalence between state and nation that assumes behind every sovereign state there is also a nation. Contrastingly, when a nation is not a state it must therefore assert its right to be recognized as such. According to Caminal, as long as the idea that there must be a correspondence and equivalence between state and nation continues to exist, a vicious cycle of nationalisms in permanent confrontation will also continue to exist.¹⁴⁴

Caminal quotes Lord Acton to highlight this point:

The greatest adversary of the rights of nationality is the modern theory of nationality. By making the State and the nation commensurate with each

¹⁴¹ Keating, *Plurinational Democracy*, p. 26-27.

¹⁴² Keating, *Plurinational Democracy*, p. 160.

¹⁴³ Miquel Caminal, “Democracy, federalism, and plurinational states,” in Requejo and Caminal (eds.), *Political Liberalism and Plurinational Democracies*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 226-251.

¹⁴⁴ Caminal, “Democracy, federalism, and plurinational states,” p. 233.

other in theory, it reduces practically to a subject condition all other nationalities that may be within the boundary. It cannot admit them to an equality with the ruling nation which constitutes the State, because the State would then cease to be national, which would be a contradiction of the principle of its existence. According, therefore, to the degree of humanity and civilization in that dominant body which claims all the rights of the community, the inferior races are exterminated, or reduced to servitude, or outlawed, or put in a condition of dependence.¹⁴⁵

Thus, the illusion of a correspondence between state and nation hides the reality of a mononational state sitting atop a plurinational society. It is in this sense, according to Caminal, that “the contrast between the *political nation-state* and other nations, as *cultural nations* and members of the political nation, is incorrect, discriminatory and exclusive.”¹⁴⁶ Relatedly, the third and final fallacy that Caminal illuminates is the cultural uniformity of the modern state. The history of the modern state is characterized by “the construction of a uniformity, of a monocultural *us*, in which diversity has been rejected and persecuted through the repression, expulsion or assimilation of those who are different.”¹⁴⁷ Caminal correctly highlights how plurinationality challenges this monoculturalism by raising the issue of “the *others*, that is, those who manifest their right to be different and to be recognised as such.”¹⁴⁸

While scholars of plurinationalism are correct to highlight the deficiencies of the notion of nation state sovereignty, the false equivalence between the state and nation, and the deleterious effects of monoculturalism, they come to this conclusion based on the argument that processes of globalization and transnationalization have

¹⁴⁵ Lord Acton (1908), quoted in Caminal, “Democracy, federalism, and plurinational states,” pp. 233-234.

¹⁴⁶ Caminal, “Democracy, federalism, and plurinational states,” p. 237-238.

¹⁴⁷ Caminal, “Democracy, federalism, and plurinational states,” p. 240.

¹⁴⁸ Caminal, “Democracy, federalism, and plurinational states,” p. 241.

weakened the traditional power of states.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, they claim that due to the “complexity of advanced modern societies” the most relevant debates over plurality and difference occur “in those liberal societies where a number of the conditions for material well-being have been met for a large majority of the population.”¹⁵⁰ Whether or not we agree with these assertions, the desire to acknowledge, understand, and sustain the plural nature of societies is certainly not a new phenomenon nor is it one that is most pronounced in developed, modern societies. Geertz, for instance, drew our attention to the difficulties facing the newly emerging post-colonial states during the mid 20th century as they tried to structure a new political order on top of the “multiplicity of communalisms” that comprised those societies, a process he labeled the “integrative revolution.”¹⁵¹ Additionally, the importance of plurinationality in the

¹⁴⁹ John Loughlin, “The Transformation of the democratic state in Western Europe,” in Requejo and Caminal (eds.), *Political Liberalism and Plurinational Democracies*, (New York: Routledge, 2011); and, Stephen Tierney, “Reframing Sovereignty? Sub-state national societies and the contemporary challenges to the nation-state,” in Requejo and Caminal (eds.), *Political Liberalism and Plurinational Democracies*, (New York: Routledge, 2011). In certain respects, this line of argument aligns with Hardt and Negri’s claims surrounding the rise of a deterritorialized empire. See, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹⁵⁰ Caminal, “Democracy, federalism, and plurinational states,” p. 243.

¹⁵¹ Clifford Geertz, “The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973). He argues that people of the newly established states were animated by two powerful, yet distinct and often opposed motives: “the desire to be recognized as responsible agents whose wishes, acts, hopes, and opinions ‘matter,’ and the desire to build an efficient, dynamic, modern state. The one aim is to be noticed: it is a search for an identity and a demand that the identity be publicly acknowledged as having import, a social assertion of the self as ‘being somebody in the world.’ The other aim is practical: it is a demand for progress, for a rising standard of living, more effective political order, greater social justice...” (258). It should be noted that Geertz provides a solution to this quandary. He argues “what the new states – or their leaders – must somehow contrive to do as far as primordial attachments are concerned is not, as they have so often tried to do, wish them out of existence by belittling them or even denying their reality, but domesticate them. They must reconcile them with the unfolding civil order by divesting them of their legitimizing force with respect to governmental authority, by neutralizing the apparatus of the state in relationship to them, and by channeling discontent arising out of their dislocation into properly political rather than parapolitical forms of expression” (277). Despite Geertz analytical acumen, his political prescriptions are thoroughly imbued with a desire for nation and state correspondence and cohesion associated with the modern nation state. As he later notes, “a simple,

Andes derives not so much due to the implications of globalization but rather to the fact that the ideal of sovereignty in its traditional sense as applying solely to the national state has served to justify a violent process of homogenizing social plurality in the desire for capitalist modernization and governmentality.¹⁵²

Within the Andes, the concept of plurinationality has been most influential in Bolivia and Ecuador. In Ecuador, for example, the idea of plurinationality has evolved over time but is founded on the system of social classification established during colonialism that placed indigenous peoples and African slaves and their descendants at the lower rungs of society while European whites and mestizos maintained a superior social position.¹⁵³ According to Walsh, “this use of the idea of race as a permanent and conflictive matrix of power was central to the ‘civilizing’ domination of some peoples over others... [and] it assumed racial whitening as an index of ‘progress,’ and *mestizaje* – or racial mixing toward whiteness – as the national discourse of power.”¹⁵⁴ This process of racialization and its associated structure of power are fundamental in understanding the contemporary state and society, and their interrelations. When a state and society are constructed according to the interests and culture of the dominant social group, the idea of a *national* state

coherent, broadly defined ethnic structure, such as is found in most industrial societies, is not an undissolved residue of traditionalism, but an earmark of modernity” (308).

¹⁵² For a critical overview of the process of nation state formation along these lines, see Etienne Balibar, and Immanuel M. Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, (New York: Verso, 1991). For a particular focus on Latin America, see John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011);

¹⁵³ Kenneth P. Jameson, “The Indigenous Movement in Ecuador: The Struggle for a Plurinational State,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 38:1 (2011), pp. 63-73.

¹⁵⁴ Catherine Walsh, “The Plurinational and Intercultural State: Decolonization and State Re-founding in Ecuador,” *Kult* 6, Fall 2009, p. 67.

and society is an illusion, nothing more than a set of institutions which represent, reflect, and privilege this particular dominant group's culture and interests. For Walsh, it is this non-correspondence between nation state form and societal content that plurinationalism seeks to address. "The Ecuadorian nation," she argues, "continues to be obviated within the model of state and society conceived from uniformity." But, "the idea of the plurinational finds its primal sustenance in the literally plural character of the national... in those ancestral differences that continue to organize the ways of living, including the relationships with territory and nature, the exercise of authority, and the practices of law, education, health and of life itself."¹⁵⁵ In order to construct plurinationality, a refounding of the state is necessary, which implies a profound transformation of the state-society relationship. "Such a refounding," Walsh contends, "must not simply add diversity to the established structures (as the neoliberal Ecuadorian reform of 1998 did), but has to rethink those structures plurally and interculturally, thus encouraging politics of convergence, of conviviality, of complementarity and of a new and different form of unity."¹⁵⁶

These thoughts are also expressed in the proposal to Ecuador's Constituent Assembly in 2007 from the country's most prominent national indigenous movement organization, the *Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE). CONAIE, who has demanded a plurinational state since 1990, argues that plurinationality is "not just a formal declaration in the first article of the

¹⁵⁵ Walsh, "The Plurinational and Intercultural State," pp. 6, 68.

¹⁵⁶ Walsh, "The Plurinational and Intercultural State," pp. 70-71.

constitution, but a change in the structure of the State and the economic model.”¹⁵⁷ It is a model of decolonization that recognizes the country in its diversity and attempts to overturn the “colonial State” and its monocultural organization of things through a “plurality of democratic mechanisms,” including participatory, representative, and communitarian forms.¹⁵⁸ “It is no longer acceptable to continue assuming that there only exists one model of representation and legitimate participation. The indigenous peoples and nations of Ecuador have alternative practices to offer for the social control of the State and economy and forms of direct, collective, and organized political participation.”¹⁵⁹

Perhaps most importantly, plurinationality in Ecuador is based on a structure of self-determination and self-governance of the country’s indigenous peoples and nations. CONAIE claims plurinationality “promotes social and political equality, economic justice, the recognition of society’s interculturality, and the right of indigenous nations and peoples to territorial control and communitarian government inside the unified national State.”¹⁶⁰ Plurinational forms of indigenous self-governance, to be clear, do not imply the fragmentation or balkanization of the state, nor the isolation or enclosure of indigenous communities. Rather, it is the political recognition of the various distinct indigenous nations and the operation of their self-

¹⁵⁷ CONAIE, “Propuesta de la CONAIE frente a la Asamblea Constituyente,” (Quito: CONAIE, 2007), p. 6.

¹⁵⁸ CONAIE, “Propuesta de la CONAIE frente a la Asamblea Constituyente,” (Quito: CONAIE, 2007), pp. 9, 7.

¹⁵⁹ CONAIE, “Propuesta de la CONAIE frente a la Asamblea Constituyente,” (Quito: CONAIE, 2007), p. 6.

¹⁶⁰ CONAIE, “Propuesta de la CONAIE frente a la Asamblea Constituyente,” (Quito: CONAIE, 2007), p. 10.

determination and self-governance as a condition for decolonization and the construction of interculturality and equality between the various cultures of the country.¹⁶¹ The recognition of indigenous self-governance acknowledges the right of indigenous peoples to their own forms of political authority and is a form of social power, “an expression of the sovereignty of society that can and should control the administration of the State.”¹⁶² A fundamental aspect of indigenous self-governance is that indigenous communities should to be incorporated into the system of state decision-making with respect to issues of natural resource extraction, particularly oil.¹⁶³ What this means in practice is the implementation of a process of “prior and informed consent” of all affected communities, *before* any form of exploration and/or extraction.¹⁶⁴ This clearly does not mean the end to all extractive practices, but only that the communities directly affected by these activities that have historically contaminated the natural environment and sickened the populations inhabiting those areas are included in the political decision-making process around resource extraction.

Plurinationality in Bolivia

In Bolivia the earliest mention of plurinationality comes from a CSUTCB national congress in 1983 where it is argued “there cannot be a true liberation if the

¹⁶¹ Edwin Cruz Rodríguez, “Estado plurinacional, interculturalidad y autonomía indígena: Una reflexión sobre los casos de Bolivia y Ecuador,” *Revista VIA IURIS*, 14 (2013), pp. 57-58.

¹⁶² CONAIE, “Propuesta de la CONAIE frente a la Asamblea Constituyente,” (Quito: CONAIE, 2007), p. 11.

¹⁶³ Jameson, “The Indigenous Movement in Ecuador: The Struggle for a Plurinational State,” p. 70.

¹⁶⁴ CONAIE, “Propuesta de la CONAIE frente a la Asamblea Constituyente,” (Quito: CONAIE, 2007), pp. 22, 28.

plurinational diversity of our country and the diverse forms of self-governance of our peoples are not respected.”¹⁶⁵ Borne out of the country’s colonial and neocolonial historical context, the idea of plurinationality is founded on the recognition and maintenance of the different cultures, economies, politics, subjectivities, and worldviews coexisting, overlapping, and interacting in the geographic territory of Bolivia. It is also based on the dispersal of power and, according to its proponents, requires a radical departure from the power structure of the liberal nation-state.¹⁶⁶ From this perspective, plurinationality requires “a radical break with liberalism... and questions the total structure of the nation-state and the liberal principles that sustain it.”¹⁶⁷ Through the recognition of indigenous peoples as collective political subjects, plurinationality “transcends the liberal and monocultural State based on the individual citizen.”¹⁶⁸ It has been the historic failure of the modern state to fully incorporate indigenous Bolivians as citizens with equal prospects for the material and cultural reproduction of their communal lives that has brought forward the demands to refound Bolivia along plurinational lines.¹⁶⁹ In this sense, “the plurinational horizon represents the possibility of democratically reconstituting the country, which would at

¹⁶⁵ Jiovanny Samanamud, “Hacia una ‘arquitectónica’ del proceso constituyente,” *Willka*, 3:3 (2009), p. 81. See also, Esteban Ticona, Gonzalo Rojas, and Xavier Albó, *Votos y Wiphalas: Campesinos y Pueblos Originarios en Democracia*, (La Paz: CIPCA, 1995), p. 215

¹⁶⁶ Author interview with Cancio Rojas, CONAMAQ leader, La Paz, Bolivia February 2, 2015.

¹⁶⁷ Consuelo Sánchez, “Autonomía y pluralismo: Estados plurinacionales y pluriétnicos,” in Miguel González, Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor, and Pablo Ortiz (eds.), *La autonomía a debate: Autogobierno indígena y estado plurinacional en América Latina*, (Quito: FLACSO, 2011), p. 283.

¹⁶⁸ Pacto de Unidad, “Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente,” *OSAL*, 8 (22), 2007, p. 167

¹⁶⁹ Fernando Garcés, *Los Indígenas y su Estado (pluri)nacional: una Mirada al proceso constituyente boliviano*, (Cochabamba: UMSS and CLACSO, 2013), p. 39.

the same time overcome the hierarchical relations between different peoples and cultures, that is, internal colonialism.”¹⁷⁰

In *El horizonte plurinacional* Luis Tapia contends that plurinationality as a concept recognizes the existence of a plurality of heterogeneous political spaces that, nevertheless, can coordinate and compliment one another while they each form part of the same multicultural political regime.¹⁷¹ This plurality not only entails the existence of various groups that speak different languages, maintain different cultures, and practice particular spiritual traditions, but is also understood to include these groups’ distinct political structures of authority, their social structures, and worldviews. “In these conditions, plurinationality implies the mutual recognition of different cultures that come together to create a new form of political unity.¹⁷² Yet, the notion of political unity here does not imply unity in the sense of a single, unified practice of politics. According to Mamani, unity in this context is “not understood in the classic sense of the term where one group, whether because of the Leviathan (that is, war) or others, imposes itself on others, as if this one group represented everyone.” Rather, the idea of unity applies in the sense that it refers to the state as a cultural, political, territorial, and economic construction, a thing, at a specific time and place in the world. Yet, the desire of plurality refers to how the “nations, peoples, and actors articulate together in horizontal and open ways, in a manner where all groups respect

¹⁷⁰ Luis Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, (La Paz: Autodeterminación, 2015), p. 8.

¹⁷¹ Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, p. 69.

¹⁷² Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, p. 69.

one another.”¹⁷³ However, the demand for plurinationality arose not simply as an inherent trait of Bolivia’s indigenous peoples. The idea of plurinationality, what it means, what it challenges and seeks to change, all must be understood in relation to historical and cultural context.

For Tapia, the demand for plurinationality responds to a dual process of nation making occurring at the same time, although on different scales. He argues that the Bolivian nation as a form of political identification related to the political organization of the state (i.e. the nation state) was meant to correspond with the expansion of capitalist modernity throughout the country. The expansion of capitalism, it was thought, would transform the countryside not only technologically, but also sociologically and culturally through the development of the capitalist social class structure. But, in order for this work, Tapia argues, the process needed to be inclusive, which implied some form of redistribution of wealth and political power.¹⁷⁴ However, the historical construction of the nation state in Bolivia “has been an extremely weak and contradictory form of unification, that is to say, it has been a process of political inclusion founded on the colonial characteristics of exploitation and discrimination of the indigenous peoples and cultures.”¹⁷⁵ Drawing on Zavaleta’s methodological insight that periods of crisis reveal, at the same time, that which is breaking down and that which is possible, we can see both the potential and the failure of the project of nation state formation at various times of crisis, including the

¹⁷³ Pablo Mamani Ramírez, “Estado plurinacional: Entre el nuevo proyecto y la factualidad colonial,” *Willka*, 3:3 (2009), p. 38, 39.

¹⁷⁴ Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, p. 55.

¹⁷⁵ Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, p. 43.

Federal War of 1899, the National Revolution of 1952, the Popular Assembly of 1970-71, and the neoliberal multiculturalism of the 1990s, amongst others.¹⁷⁶ Each of these moments might be seen as critical junctures where the possibilities for new understandings of the Bolivian nation and its relation with the state form opened up. Yet, in the struggle to define and organize and the new nation-state-society matrix, the so-called “national question,” the social relations of power and production remained firmly within what Quijano has conceptualized as the coloniality of power.¹⁷⁷ That is, despite efforts to the contrary, constructing a homogenized Bolivian nation was to be achieved not through the fundamental expansion and democratization of social and political relations, but by the continued exclusion or limited cultural recognition of indigenous peoples.¹⁷⁸ In this sense, Tapia argues, “the history of the country demonstrates that the form of political unification that the Bolivian nation has experienced is really better understood as a form of national and social disarticulation and disintegration.”¹⁷⁹

While the project to construct a Bolivian nation state was fragmenting, other processes of national construction were making headway amongst Bolivia’s various ethnic groups, what Tapia labels “communitarian nations.”¹⁸⁰ It is these communitarian nations that are at the heart of the plurinational project. As an

¹⁷⁶ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, p. XX.

¹⁷⁷ See Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1:3 (2000), pp. 533-580.

¹⁷⁸ Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” p. 564.

¹⁷⁹ Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, p. 43.

¹⁸⁰ Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, p. 41. If typically the idea of a nation has been linked to a corresponding state, the concept of “communitarian nation” refers to those peoples and nations that have maintained or reconstituted their ancestral social structures, forms of (re)production, their language and worldviews throughout the periods of colonialism and liberal modernity.

alternative to the Bolivian nation state and in an attempt to democratize the social and political relations of power, over the last few decades “processes of national formation, of the reconstitution of nations or the political reconstitution of some peoples as nations” throughout Bolivia’s indigenous populations have resulted in new demands to transform or “refound” the Bolivian nation and state.¹⁸¹ The process of transforming the state would require “not just the inclusion of indigenous people as individuals but also through incorporating their forms of political action in the new governing structure of the country, in the mode of a plurinational state.”¹⁸² But, plurinationality is not only a question of reorganizing the state in order to incorporate other forms of political practice and authority. The possibility of plurinationality also depends on a transformation in the understanding and the form of Bolivia as a nation. “In this sense,” Tapia argues, “it is not only a question of transforming the state... but, above all, a substantive reform within what may be called the Bolivian nation is needed that would make possible a transformation of the relations between peoples and cultures.”¹⁸³

According to the proposal of the *Pacto de Unidad* (Unity Pact) to the Constituent Assembly in 2006, plurinationality is “ a model of political organization for the decolonization of our nations and peoples that reaffirms, recuperates, and strengthens our territorial autonomy in order to achieve a full life and to live well.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, p. 41.

¹⁸² Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, p. 42.

¹⁸³ Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, p. 43.

¹⁸⁴ Pacto de Unidad, “Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente,” p. 167. The Pacto de Unidad formed in 2004 and provided crucial support for the MAS and Evo Morales during the 2005 election. It was an

Plurinationality is “a way toward our own self-determination as nations and peoples, in order to define our communitarian politics, social systems, economies, political and legal systems, and in this way reaffirm our own structures of governance, election of authorities and administration of justice, all with respect for their different ways of life and their use of space and territory.”¹⁸⁵ In addition, they state that the concept is based on the fundamental principles of “juridical pluralism, unity, complementarity, reciprocity, equality, solidarity, and the moral and ethical principle of ending all forms of corruption.”¹⁸⁶ Thus, we can see that for the indigenous and peasant movements who originally developed the idea of plurinationality, it fundamentally represents a path of decolonization and self-determination for those groups who have borne the brunt of historically institutionalized inequality and systemic discrimination. Additionally, the principles of reciprocity, complementarity, equality, and solidarity are key to understanding the interrelational aspect of plurinationality. Communities are not enclosed and completely self-sustaining entities. In order to continually produce and reproduce their forms of life they need to form complementary and reciprocal relations with other communities and cultures.

However, inter-cultural relations should be based on principles of respect and

organization of the most important indigenous and peasant movement organizations in the country, including the national peasant union organization CSUTCB (Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia), the women’s peasant movement organization las Bartolinas (Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia “Bartolina Sisa”), the lowland indigenous organization CIDOB (Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia), the highland indigenous organization CONAMAQ (Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu), and the intercultural CSCIB (Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales de Bolivia, formerly known as the Colonizadores).

¹⁸⁵ Pacto de Unidad, “Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente,” p. 168.

¹⁸⁶ Pacto de Unidad, “Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente,” p. 167.

solidarity for each community's different ways of life and worldviews, instead of through violence, subordination, exploitation, and exclusion, which the Unity Pact argues has been the predominant historical form of intercultural exchange.

Another central feature of plurinationality is the inclusion of multiple forms of political participation. "Sovereignty resides in the people, whose collective will is the base of political authority, and should be exercised through the mechanisms of representative, participatory, communitarian, deliberative, and direct forms of democracy."¹⁸⁷ The mechanisms through which these various forms of participation are carried out are grouped into participatory and representative forms. Practices such as referendums, plebiscites, popular recall, and communal, indigenous, and popular assemblies exemplify to the former, while elections of representatives for distinct levels of government through the universal secret ballot as well as through *usos y costumbres* in the indigenous territories applies to the latter. We can see that plurinationality attempts to incorporate multiple forms of political participation that ostensibly correspond to different historical temporalities, to both "modern" states and "traditional" cultures.

The final major characteristics of the plurinational state according to the Unity Pact relates to the issues of land, territory, and indigenous autonomy. While land is defined simply as property to be distributed, accessed, used, sold, etc., the notion of territory is seen as the productive and cultural base of all communities that allows for

¹⁸⁷ Pacto de Unidad, "Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente," p. 169.

their continued reproduction and existence.¹⁸⁸ Therefore, without access to and control over land and territory, the idea of plurinationality as a confederation of multiple nations and cultures ceases to exist. Plurinational forms of land tenure incorporate both systems of private property and practices of collective ownership. In indigenous territories, lands are to be administered following local norms and procedures and “are collectively and communally controlled, and are non-transferrable, imprescriptible, inalienable, irreversible, indivisible, and exempt from tax.”¹⁸⁹ Similarly, Tapia argues that collective land tenure is fundamental for plurinationality. He states that if the idea of plurinationality “is based on the cultural diversity existing in Bolivia, it can only be maintained and developed through the defense and extension of the forms of collective land tenure.”¹⁹⁰ In relation to territory, which is meant to include subsoil resources, the Unity Pact argues that the original authorities over natural resources are the indigenous, native, and peasant nations and peoples of Bolivia. Therefore, “all extraction of both renewable and non-renewable resources in indigenous territories is subject to processes of obligatory and prior consultation with the social organizations of the area.... Before any commercial exploration and/or exploitation of natural resources there should be participatory studies of the socioeconomic, environmental, and community impacts.”¹⁹¹ As we will

¹⁸⁸ Pacto de Unidad, “Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente,” p. 181.

¹⁸⁹ Pacto de Unidad, “Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente,” p. 180.

¹⁹⁰ Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, p. 137.

¹⁹¹ Pacto de Unidad, “Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente,” p. 178.

see in chapter three on the TIPNIS conflict, control and decision-making power over territory is a central area of conflict between plurinationality and hegemony.

Indigenous autonomy is the key characteristic of plurinationality as it encompasses all the aspects outlined above in specific territorial units. The specific elements that characterize indigenous autonomies are: territory; a population with a common language, culture, and history; indigenous government and administration of justice based on local norms and procedures; control and management over land and territory.¹⁹² Indigenous territorial autonomies point the way toward a new form of plurinational state, the Unity Pact asserts, as they “break the vertical power structure of the contemporary State, which permits the construction of a new State ‘from below.’”¹⁹³ According to Mamani, the “territorial cartography” of Bolivia, its departments, provinces, and municipalities, is based on a colonial and republican logic of spatial organization, which contrasts with the territorial logic of plurinationality. Therefore, Mamani argues, “the reconstitution of ‘ancestral territories’ and the redistribution of land, is a central part of decolonizing the state and implementing plurinationality.”¹⁹⁴ Thus, indigenous autonomies, despite certain limitations, which will be discussed in chapter five on the construction of formal *Autonomías Indígena Originario Campesina* (AIOC), will necessarily play a

¹⁹² Pacto de Unidad, “Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente,” p. 175.

¹⁹³ Pacto de Unidad, “Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente,” p.173.

¹⁹⁴ Mamani Ramírez, “Estado plurinacional,” p. 47.

fundamental role in territorially, institutionally, and administratively transforming the Bolivian nation state into a plurinational state.

Plurinationality is therefore an attempt to conceptualize and theorize and hence understand and deal with Bolivia's *formación abigarrada*, to use Zavaleta's term. However, whereas for Zavaleta the plurality or motley-ness of Bolivia was to be overcome through the hegemonic articulation of a national popular identity, the idea of plurinationality contrasts with a national popular hegemony and is closer to what Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar has termed the "communitarian popular."¹⁹⁵ As discussed above, Zavaleta's notion of the national popular can be understood as a desire to create an inclusive popular democratic national state, in other words, a hegemony created and led by the popular classes. For Gutiérrez,

the national-popular horizon... [seeks to] install a series of mediations in order to establish minimally satisfactory forms of economic and political inclusion of the social heterogeneity into a comprehensive and ostensibly equal political totality. That is, if the national-popular can be understood as the general social aspiration to endow and represent itself collectively through an inclusive and democratic national State, the Bolivian struggles of 2000-2005 exceeded that horizon and tried to create different political connections that were self-regulating and new, although not exempt from difficulties, and, above all, lacking understandable and clear forms of expression and communication beyond grand radical slogans ('civil war', 'refoundation of Qullasuyu', 'social reappropriation of the commons', 'Constituent Assembly without political party intermediation', etc.).¹⁹⁶

Gutiérrez Aguilar's notion of the communitarian popular, like plurinationality, attempts to go beyond the national popular perspective as it aims to rethink and

¹⁹⁵ Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, *Los Ritmos del Pachakuti: Levantamiento y movilización en Bolivia, 2000-2005*, (Mexico City: Bajo Tierras Ediciones, 2009). This work has also been published in English as *Rhythms of the Pachakuti: Indigenous Uprisings and State Power in Bolivia*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

¹⁹⁶ Gutiérrez Aguilar, *Los Ritmos del Pachakuti*, pp. 345-346.

experiment with the relationship between state and society through the reorganization of power and the configuration or reconstitution of autonomous spaces where decision-making is centered locally. Political authority is based on the organization of communities themselves, where decisions surrounding the material and cultural reproduction of the community and its mode of political constitution are inseparable. In contrast to liberal representative politics where “some govern, others are governed and, at most, periodically delegate their political voice to some authority via their votes,” the communitarian popular view of politics consists of “providing the mechanisms and formats to *guarantee shared responsibility* for the totality of collective affairs.”¹⁹⁷ According to Gutiérrez, we can see instances of the communitarian popular throughout the 2000-2005 period of upheaval as subaltern social groups throughout the valleys and across the *altiplano* sought to subject decision making over common resources to the deliberation and approval of local community authorities rather than to directives from above, what she labels a time of *pachakuti*.¹⁹⁸ These collective acts, she argues, “challenged the idea of private and/or state-owned property as the only possible options and placed the possibility of

¹⁹⁷ Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, “Competing political visions and Bolivia’s unfinished revolution,” *Dialectical Anthropology*, 35 (2011), p. 276.

¹⁹⁸ The term *pachakuti* has sometimes been loosely connoted with the concept of revolution. In metaphysical terms, it is typically described as a turning upside down or revolution of space and time and is thought about in long-term, cyclical fashion. According to James Dunkerley, the term conjoins words that variously signify time/earth/place/moment (*pacha*) and change/shift/cycle/alternation (*kuti*). See, James Dunkerley, “*Pachakuti* in Bolivia, 2008-2010: a personal diary,” in Adrian J. Pearce (ed.), *Evo Morales and the Movimiento al Socialismo in Bolivia: The First Term in Context*, (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2011), p. 189. For Gutiérrez, the Andean concept is understood to mean “the ambition, the longing, the search for a fundamental inversion of the order of things. Basically, as an inversion of the political order whereby what was inside and below, like the innermost logic of the communities, now becomes visible, valid, legitimate, that which is “outside” and “above”: it is, then, a general upheaval of the mode of living together, not just a modification of those exercising governmental power” (*Los Ritmos del Pachakuti*, 153).

‘collective property’ at the center of the political discussion, and... offered a radical inversion of exercising political authority, emptying the so-called ‘central power’ of all possibility of imposition.’¹⁹⁹

Elsewhere, Gutiérrez contrasts the desire of classic revolutionary struggles for hegemony focused on the taking of state power with the transformative desires surrounding her idea of communitarian popular struggle. National popular struggles for hegemony, she argues, have typically been theorized in terms of stability where a previously stable and totalized society undergoes a process of social, political, and/or economic destabilization, which throws the hegemonic order into doubt and opens up space for a counter hegemonic power bloc to challenge the existing order of things.²⁰⁰ Additionally, the revolutionary strategy undergirding the hegemonic struggle to take state power “consisted of building organizations that were highly internally cohesive, hierarchical, and disciplined to the point that they could organize around – and of course, direct – the set of social struggles in a particular country.”²⁰¹ The ultimate goal or outcome of the hegemonic struggle from this perspective is to reach a new moment of stable totalization through the power of the state. In contrast to the above, Gutiérrez argues “the central question [for the communitarian popular perspective] is the systematic detotalization of the existing structure, and the partial reconstruction of new realities that will be permanently detotalized, a kind of journey without end,

¹⁹⁹ Gutiérrez Aguilar, *Los Ritmos del Pachakuti*, p. 346.

²⁰⁰ Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, *Horizonte Comunitario-Popular: Antagonismo y producción de lo común en América Latina*, (Cochabamba: SOCEE, Editorial Autodeterminación, 2015), pp. 20-21.

²⁰¹ Raquel Gutiérrez, “The Rhythms of the *Pachakuti*: Brief Reflections Regarding How We Have Come to Know Emancipatory Struggles and the Significance of the Term *Social Emancipation*,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 111:1 (2012), p. 56.

where the future is not determined beforehand but is instead constructed piece by piece through the multi-level disputes of the here and now.”²⁰² In other words, we need to move beyond thinking in terms of social totality and ostensible stability. Rather than attempting to recreate the impossible (i.e. a stable social totality in the context of a motley social formation), the point is to think society in a context of instability and without any predetermined endpoint, which leaves the future open, and live within the contradictions of social life. “The will for transformation does not have to express itself in a new *totality*,” Gutiérrez claims, “it requires strengthening the expression, the visibilization, and repeatedly bringing to light that which is *particular*.”²⁰³

However, Gutiérrez’s concept of the communitarian popular only goes so far in its relation with plurinationality. As Gutiérrez makes clear throughout her work, the communitarian popular is an anti-statist perspective. “To this day, no government, be it progressive or revolutionary, has been concerned with the question of how to dissolve the structures of power – that is, allowing ‘self-government’, admitting plurality, and enabling conditions for the self-regulation of society” Gutiérrez asserts.²⁰⁴ As such, “the central problematic of the communitarian-popular horizon is not about – nor do I think it can be – the reconstitution of any type of state.”²⁰⁵ Plurinationality, on the other hand, is not anti-statist *in general*, but is rather against a *particular* conceptualization and form of state, the liberal nation state, which

²⁰² Gutiérrez Aguilar, *Horizonte Comunitario-Popular*, p. 21.

²⁰³ Gutiérrez Aguilar, *Los Ritmos del Pachakuti*, p. 358.

²⁰⁴ Gutiérrez, “The Rhythms of the *Pachakuti*,” p. 60.

²⁰⁵ Gutiérrez Aguilar, *Horizonte Comunitario-Popular*, p. 32.

equates the nation and the state. Fontana, for instance, points out that plurinationalism indicates there is “no longer one ‘imagined community’ (as postulated by nationalism), but many ‘imagined communities; not one, but many nations,” all situated within the geographical borders of the state.²⁰⁶ The Unity Pact is clear that they understand the plurinational state to still be a state, although it is a distinct form of state. In the section entitled “Model of the State” from their proposal to the Constituent Assembly, the Unity Pact in a long-winded phrase claims “the Bolivian State is unitary, plurinational, pluriethnic, pluricultural, intercultural and plurilingual, decentralized with indigenous, native and peasant territorial autonomies, in addition to urban intercultural autonomies and regional autonomies, all with respect to the different forms of life and use of space and territory.”²⁰⁷ Viaña also makes clear that plurinationalism is not anti-statist in general and argues that the plurinational state is “a State configured by forms of direct democracy and self representation,” and should be “understood as a type of State that destructures the

²⁰⁶ Lorenza Fontana, “The ‘indigenous native peasant’ trinity: imagining a plurinational community in Evo Morales’s Bolivia,” *Environmental Planning D: Society and Space*, 32 (2014), p. 532. Fontana fails, however, to understand how that plurality of nations is a direct challenge to the idea of the nation state itself, and the definition of the “nation” inherent in that socio-political formation. She argues, for instance, “the plurinational state is based on the formal recognition of different ethnocultural groups (defined in terms of ‘peoples’ and ‘nations’) within the framework of an (often nationalistic) nation-state. The idea of ‘nation’ in its classical meaning still persists: what is questioned is its biunivocal correspondence with the geopolitical dimension of the state” (523, n. 5). Later, she argues “plurinationalism challenges the state-nation biunivocal correspondence, but not the nation as an identitarian, ideological, and institutional superstructure that organizes and complements the state” (532). Fontana is correct that both the nation and the state remain, but both are transformed and/or redefined under the terms of plurinationality as the one (nation) no longer implies the possession of or correspondence with the other (state).

²⁰⁷ Pacto de Unidad, “Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente,” p. 168.

classic form of liberal politics and its ‘State form.’”²⁰⁸ Despite the plurality of nations, peoples, and identities within Bolivia, it is clear that the heterogeneous cultural, political, and economic formations that the concept of plurinationality attempts to theorize are nevertheless encompassed within an overarching politico-territorial state.

Raul Prada argues that the idea of the plurinational state offers us a new conception of the transition away from capitalism, distinct from the Marxist idea of the overthrow of capitalism by a dictatorship of the proletariat. The central difference between these two conceptions, Prada claims, is that “while the dictatorship of the proletariat was thought as a socialist transition toward communism, it does not challenge the horizons of modernity. Contrastingly, the pluralist transition breaks with and crosses the limits of modernity, and brings forth other civilizational organizing structures.”²⁰⁹ The plurinational state, Prada asserts, “is constructed from the perspective of indigenous worldviews as they interpellate modernity and capitalism. These worldviews are dynamic interpretative systems, remembering and updating their own history in order to critically interpret the structures and institutions of modernity, such as the State, above all in its nation-State form.”²¹⁰ However, the fact that plurinationality questions the legitimacy of modernity does not imply that indigenous worldviews, knowledges, and movements are somehow not modern, or

²⁰⁸ Jorge Viaña, “Estado plurinacional y nueva fase del proceso boliviano,” in Mabel Thwaites Rey (ed.), *El Estado en América Latina: Continuidades y rupturas*, (Santiago: CLACSO, 2012), p. 387.

²⁰⁹ Raúl Prada Alcoreza, “Estado plurinacional comunitario autonómico y pluralismo jurídico,” in Boaventura de Sousa Santos and José Luis Exeni Rodríguez (eds.), *Justicia Indígena, Plurinacionalidad e Interculturalidad en Bolivia*, (La Paz: Fundación Rosa Luxemburg, 2012), p. 407. This “pluralist transition” also implies “the disappearance of the figure of the vanguard intellectual... and also the disappearance of the figure of the revolutionary party, as an entity outside of or above the social movements” (422).

²¹⁰ Prada Alcoreza, “Estado plurinacional comunitario autonómico y pluralismo jurídico,” p. 408.

they wish to return to some pure, idealized space and time before the colonial conquest. Instead, as plurinationality is founded on the historical and cultural differences inscribed in Bolivia's motley social formation and the failure of the state to adequately reflect this heterogeneity, the plurinational horizon exposes the lie of modernity. "There is not just one modernity, there are many," Prada argues, "we exist in a heterogeneity of modernities."²¹¹ There is not just one form of the state or one idea of the nation, nor is there only one form of economic organization or a single system of knowing the world. Plurinationality is a conceptualization of this multiplicity and a way of theorizing how different historical temporalities coexist, overlap, and interact. Plurinationality "is a space-time involving multiple ways of being, seeing, doing, and living in the world."²¹²

However, plurinationality should not be understood simply to entail various distinct and autonomous social units increasingly separated from one another. Plurinationality "is not just the manifestation and expression of the historical, political, and social moment of a multiplicity of singularities.... It is not mere social dispersion, but it is the condensation of the social and cultural fabrics of society," Prada argues.²¹³ In other words, plurinationality is both the recognition and incorporation of various singular nationalities as well as their complex and overlapping social, political, economic, and cultural interrelations. It is a complex

²¹¹ Prada Alcoreza, "Estado plurinacional comunitario autonómico y pluralism jurídico," p. 422.

²¹² Mamani Ramírez, "Estado plurinacional," p. 38.

²¹³ Raúl Prada Alcoreza, "Articulaciones de la complejidad," in Alvaro García Linera, Luis Tapia Mealla, and Raúl Prada Alcoreza, *La transformación pluralista del Estado*, (La Paz: Muela del Diablo, 2007), p. 223.

unity of different nations, peoples, and cultures following their own practices and forms of social and economic organization, all linked within the territorial and administrative geography of Bolivia. It is “a *Wiphala* state and society,” Mamani says.²¹⁴ Yet, despite the interconnectedness and transversality of the social structure, neither is this just another reworked conceptualization of *mestizaje* where the combining of distinct social groups produces a new, higher social synthesis. Instead of requiring a synthesis, Bolivia’s motley social formation demonstrates that a social synthesis is not possible, Prada argues.²¹⁵ Therefore, the idea of plurinationality draws our attention to and challenges the historically unitary character of the Bolivian nation state and its ultimately failed attempts at socially synthesizing and culturally homogenizing society. “The nation-State failed in Bolivia,” Prada states bluntly.²¹⁶ Distinct from the nation state form, he argues that the plurinational state at least attempts to correspond to the multisocietal condition of Bolivia.²¹⁷ Plurinationality as a conceptualization of Bolivia’s motley social formation and the plurinational state as the political expression of that concept, Prada declares, “does not approve the unification of the diverse, the homogenization of difference. It opens up the possibility of combining distinct forms of organization... and opens up those organizational structures to contingency.”²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Mamani Ramírez, “Estado plurinacional,” p. 37. The *wiphala* is a multi-colored flag that represents indigenous peoples throughout the Andes. In Bolivia’s 2009 Consitution, in addition to the traditional red, yellow, and green flag of the republic, the wiphala is recognized as a national emblem of the plurinational state.

²¹⁵ Prada Alcoreza, “Articulaciones de la complejidad,” p. 245.

²¹⁶ Prada Alcoreza, “Articulaciones de la complejidad,” p. 210.

²¹⁷ Prada Alcoreza, “Articulaciones de la complejidad,” pp. 235.

²¹⁸ Prada Alcoreza, “Articulaciones de la complejidad,” pp. 210-211.

The Plurinational Horizon

For Mamani, the plurinational state, at least in theory, “is different in its philosophy, in its theory, and in its practice from the oligarchic monocultural forms of power and liberal institutional politics. It is an anti-racist, anti-neocolonial, anti-neoliberal, and anti-oligarchic state due to the fact that it is internally constituted by different cultures, economies, desires, different civilizations and their logical systems of argumentation or thought.”²¹⁹ Plurinationality represents a different horizon, a different desire, of social, cultural, political, and economic relations of power. Perhaps the plurinational, like Gutiérrez’s notion of emancipation, “implies choosing what is utopian, the *future*, for that which remains to be clearly formulated against and beyond the limit of what is presented as ‘possible’ and put forth by the inert weight of the traditional order.”²²⁰ In this sense, according to Mamani, “the plurinational state is still only a project and is not yet a fact or a reality.”²²¹ At the present time, Bolivia remains what Choque Mamani has termed an “apparent plurinational state.”²²²

In addition, plurinationality as a theory and as practice is, unsurprisingly, not a completely comprehensive and coherent paradigm. There are plenty of contradictions, tensions, and conflicting currents within the plurinational project. Theoretically, for instance, the discourse on plurality oftentimes blurs with much of

²¹⁹ Mamani Ramírez, “Estado plurinacional,” p. 35.

²²⁰ Gutiérrez Aguilar, *Los Ritmos del Pachakuti*, p. 349.

²²¹ Pablo Mamani Ramírez, “Presentación,” *Willka*, 3:3 (2009), p. 8.

²²² Téofilo Choque Mamani, *Estado plurinacional aparente*, (La Paz: Autodeterminación, 2014).

the theorizing on neoliberal multiculturalism, which makes it difficult to distinguish between the core theoretical tenets of plurinationalism and those of liberal pluralism.²²³ In terms of strategic practice, the historical subject(s) pressing the demand for plurinationality are often pushing in different directions and in conflict with one another. As Fernando Mayorga pointed out, the so-called indigenous native peasant (indígena originario campesino) subject was an attempt by the Unity Pact, which was composed of various highland and Amazonian indigenous groups along with rural peasants and workers, to present a unified front against the state during the 2000-2005 upheavals and during the 2006-2008 Constituent Assembly. Although it is difficult to determine interests based simply on identity, indigenous peoples and peasants have historically struggled to improve their lot in different strategic ways and with different goals in mind. Thus, the conceptual merging of indigenous and native peoples with peasants into a single category might not actually correspond with sociological reality.²²⁴ As such, various tensions and conflicts have arisen surrounding the interests and political strategy of the various groups fused in the indigenous native peasant trinity.²²⁵

²²³ See, for instance, Felix Patzi Paco, *Sistema Communal: Una propuesta alternativa al sistema liberal*, (La Paz: Editorial Vicuña, 2009), pp. 137-158.

²²⁴ Author interview, Cochabamba, August 9, 2013. See also, Fernando Mayorga, *Incertidumbres tácticas: Ensayos sobre democracia, populismo y ciudadanía*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, PIEB, 2014), pp. 41-43, 51-52.

²²⁵ See, Fontana, "The 'indigenous native peasant' trinity: imagining a plurinational community in Evo Morales's Bolivia." For an analysis of the specific confrontation between the Leco indigenous organization and the local peasant union in Apolo, see Lorenza Belinda Fontana, "Indigenous Peoples vs. Peasant Unions: Land Conflicts and Rural Movements in Plurinational Bolivia," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41:3 (2014), pp. 297-319.

Despite the fact that it remains a horizon, in what specific ways does the idea and practice of plurinationality differ with and challenge the theory of hegemony? I argue that it opposes and clashes with hegemony theory in four important ways. First, if we remember that a goal of hegemony is to foreclose contestation by containing difference and plurality in any particular social formation by a dominant group working in its own interests, it is clear that plurinationality differs. A central component of plurinationality is that its literally plural structure opens it up to contingency.²²⁶ The goal is not to construct a totalized and homogenized social system, but rather acknowledge, support, and strengthen the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the social. From this perspective, not only is it impossible to completely contain or obviate social difference, but it is the act of hegemonic regulation and control that actually leads to increased social exclusion, exploitation, and conflict.

Second, if hegemony is indeed fundamentally fixed to the nation state form and its attendant structures of centralized power and hierarchical control as I argue, plurinationality seeks to cut the Gordian knot that has tied the idea of the nation to the administrative and territorial apparatus of a state. Plurinationality attempts to rethink the equation of the nation with the state by highlighting the multiplicity of communal nations and cultures within the territorial borders of the state. In this sense, the internal relations of each communal nation are just as important as the relations between the various nations. In this sense, “a plurinational democracy cannot simply

²²⁶ Prada Alcoreza, “Articulaciones de la complejidad,” pp. 210-211.

organize based on the criteria that each nation contains one and only one political position and project and it only needs the space and set of procedures needed to articulate their differences through a common government. A plurinational democracy also needs to provide the institutional space for subjects to be visible, different political subjects that constitute each nation.”²²⁷ And, while plurinationality does not contest the geographic integrity of the nation state, it does challenge its form of territorial organization through, for instance, the construction of indigenous community autonomies.

Third, as I argued above, any hegemonic struggle is essentially a conflict for the control of a series of already existing material and ideological institutions. This fact situates the conflict within a more or less predefined arena of hegemony, which, in turn, forces the subaltern power bloc to become like that which is already hegemonic if it wishes to win hegemony. It is not entirely clear if and how the theory of plurinationality can disentangle itself completely from the hegemonic form of politics it seeks to replace. Mamani, for instance, draws our attention to an apparent puzzle of the plurinational transformation of the state. He notes, “the paradox is that the state wants to reform itself and was betting on a constitutional change [i.e. the Constituent Assembly] to do so, but the operators and the statist logics of routine continue to operate outside the idea of plurinationality.”²²⁸ What this indicates is that, despite offering a new vision for the relationship between state and society, one

²²⁷ Tapia, *El horizonte plurinacional*, p. 96.

²²⁸ Mamani Ramírez, “Estado plurinacional,” p. 55.

where the plurality of institutions corresponds with the heterogeneous nature of the Bolivian social formation, the plurinational project maintains a focus on the state.

Finally, if hegemony is singular in that it is an attempt to form a “universal” will that either consensually incorporates or coercively obliterates understandings, interests, practices, and knowledges that lie outside of that so-called universal construction, plurinationality is more interested in developing the particular, or in advancing the idea of the universal understood in terms of a “multiverse” of material practices, symbolic understandings, and ideological worldviews.²²⁹

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to outline the central principles of the theories of hegemony and plurinationality, while also clarifying how each theory differs and conflicts with the other. I argue that these are the two most significant contending visions of social change and state transformation in contemporary Bolivia and understanding how they differ will help us understand the significant ideological tensions and social conflicts that have transpired throughout Bolivia’s *proceso de cambio*, such as the 2010 *gasolinazo*, the TIPNIS conflict and the breakup of the Unity Pact in 2011, and the dispute between the MAS government and the Civic Committee of Potosi in both 2010 and 2015, to name just a few examples. Rather than just struggles over specific resources or certain political or social rights, which

²²⁹ On the symbolism of plurinationality, see Yuri F. Tórréz and Claudia Arce C., *Construcción simbólica del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia: Imaginarios políticos, discursos, rituales y celebraciones*, (La Paz: PIEB, 2014).

they most certainly also are, I contend that the most contentious social conflicts in the country today revolve around and are best understood through these two contending theories of transformation.

To be clear, I am not arguing that hegemony is not a successful political strategy for power or that it fails to explain social reality, like some contend.²³⁰ Nor am I arguing that plurinationality represents a pristine form of indigenous politics or a pre-capitalist model of social relations, somehow outside of and in opposition to Western “modernity.” Rather, I am arguing that many of the tensions and contradictions of the contemporary era in Bolivia can best be understood as a conflict between these two visions of political practice and the path toward the future. Rather than a passive revolution whereby the MAS has been seduced by power and turned their back on the movements, or a period of creative tensions that are pushing the revolutionary process forward, I argue that it is a conflict between plurinationality and hegemony as a practice of politics and vision of state-society relations.

With the theoretico-conceptual apparatus in hand, in the following three chapters I will examine three particular situations where we can see how the contending visions and strategies come into conflict and play out in concrete terms. In the next chapter I will analyze the TIPNIS conflict where the MAS sought to build a highway to connect the eastern lowlands of the country with the western valley and highland regions. However, the highway was conceived to go through a national park

²³⁰ See, for instance, James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 304-350; Jon Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

and indigenous territory, which drew condemnations and large-scale protests from indigenous movements and urban civil society across the country and caused the government to repeal to proposed highway. While the dispute was certainly related to issues of land access and resources, it was fundamentally about a project a national integration through the expansion of infrastructure from the MAS's perspective and the implementation of prior and informed consultation and consent regarding development projects in indigenous territory.

The following chapter will analyze the fallout from the TIPNIS dispute through an investigation of the MAS-influenced split of the highland indigenous organization CONAMAQ. The TIPNIS affair brought a number of smaller internal conflicts within the Unity Pact to a head, forcing the two indigenous organizations, CIDOB and CONAMAQ, to officially cut ties with the Unity Pact and the MAS. In December 2013 and January 2014, the headquarters of CONAMAQ in La Paz was a site of open struggle between two factions within the organization. The MAS sided with the pro-government wing and provided material and police support as that faction physically ousted the elected leadership, took over the office and proclaimed a new council of authorities. Ostensibly an internal dispute over the organization's leadership positions and ideological direction, it was also a confrontation between the state and society and the autonomy of indigenous movements.

The final empirical chapter examines the differing paths of constructing official indigenous autonomy (AIOC's) in the municipalities of Jesus de Machaca, San Pedro Totora Marka, and Charagua. AIOC's, officially made possible in Articles

2, 30, and 290 of the new 2009 constitution and through the 2010 *Ley Marco de Autonomías y Descentralización*, are a central component of plurinationality's vision of state transformation. Yet, in the intervening seven years only one indigenous community has made it through the all bureaucratic hurdles and red tape to officially become an AIOC. Thus, this chapter interprets the possibilities and challenges of state transformation during the contemporary conjuncture.

Taken together and in a very general sense, my analyses of TIPNIS, CONAMAQ, and AIOC can be seen as an investigation into how the theoretical conflict between hegemony and plurinationality plays out in concrete terms in the spheres of the economy, society, and the state. More specifically, these moments are the crystallization of this relationship with respect to the issue and idea of development, how the government relates to and interacts with civil society groups, and an understanding of the state and its transformation.

Infrastructure, Extraction, and Indigeneity: TIPNIS and the Production of National Development

Roads and rail lines that were secondary in name but primary in fact brought the isolated patches of the countryside out of their autarky – cultural as well as economic – into the market economy and the modern world.¹

*Should this torture then torment us
Since it brings us greater pleasure?
Were not through the rule of Timur
Souls devoured without measure?²*

Introduction

On August 15, 2011, roughly 1500 marchers set out from the city of Trinidad, the capital of the lowland department of Beni, on a march toward the national capital of La Paz, 600 kilometers away.³ The marchers were protesting the construction of a highway project that would link the eastern Amazonian city of Trinidad with the central valley city of Cochabamba by traversing through the *Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécuré* (Isiboro Sécuré Indigenous Territory and National Park, TIPNIS). The march, officially named the *VIII Marcha Indígena en defensa del*

¹ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 206.

² Goethe, quoted in Karl Marx, “The British Rule in India,” in James Ledbetter (ed.), *Dispatches for the New York Tribune: Selected Journalism of Karl Marx*, (New York: Penguin Publishers, 2007), p. 218.

³ Estimates vary on the number of marchers. See, Emily Achtenberg, “Road Rage and Resistance: Bolivia’s TIPNIS Conflict,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, November/December 2011, p. 3; John-Andrew McNeish, “Extraction, Protest and Indigeneity in Bolivia: The TIPNIS Effect,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 8:2 (2013), p. 224; and Daniela Sanchez-Lopez, “Reshaping notions of citizenship: the TIPNIS indigenous movement in Bolivia,” *Development Studies Research*, 2:1 (2015), p. 21.

Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure, por la Vida, la Dignidad y los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas (8th Indigenous March in defense of the Isiboro Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park, for Life, Dignity and Indigenous Peoples' Rights), was the latest in a long history of indigenous peoples' marches from the lowlands to the nation's capital. Beginning in 1990 with the first *Marcha por el Territorio y la Dignidad* (March for Territory and Dignity), the months-long march had become a primary tactic in the repertoire of indigenous peoples' contentious political performances.⁴

On Sunday, September 25, more than a month into the 2011 march, national police forces raided the demonstrators' encampment at Chaparina, near the town of Yucomo on the border between the departments of Beni and La Paz, in order to disperse the indigenous protesters and put an end to the march. With hundreds of police officers outfitted in helmets, bullet-proof vests, body armor and shields in the area to ostensibly keep the peace between the marchers and a group of peasant supporters of the highway, they began firing canisters of tear gas, beating the marchers with truncheons, and forcefully detained hundreds of demonstrators, specifically going after the leaders of the protest. Miriam Yubánure of the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas de Bolivia* (National Confederation of Indigenous Women of Bolivia, CNAMB) noted "I was beaten because the Government was looking to torture the leaders in order to say 'there is no longer a march, just go home.'" Fernando Vargas, President of the TIPNIS Subcentral, heard

⁴ Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

an officer say as he was being detained, “we need to kill this bastard.” As the police forces continued to raid the encampment a number of the marchers scattered into the forest behind the camp, many running to the nearby town of San Borja where they were able to find shelter in the local church. With their mouths taped and their hands bound, the detained marchers were loaded onto buses and, without knowing where they were being taken, transported to the town of Rurrenabaque, a 10-hour journey, to be loaded onto planes. Fortunately for the marchers, the townspeople of Rurrenabaque caught wind of what was happening and themselves marched on the airport, shutting down all air traffic and forcing the police to release the detained protesters.⁵

After the attack became public, two government ministers and a number of other officials resigned their positions in protest while nationwide strikes paralyzed the country’s departmental capitals. Evo Morales publicly apologized for the use of force against the protestors and asked for forgiveness, but denied responsibility for the attack, claiming the police had broke the chain of command. Now with huge national support, the march resumed and finally arrived in La Paz on October 19 as thousands of *Paceños* lined the streets to cheer the marchers on. Weeks after the protesters arrived in the capital, in a seeming about-face, the government gave in to

⁵ Fundación Tierra, *Marcha indígena pro el TIPNIS: La lucha en defensa de los territorios*, (La Paz: Fundación Tierra, 2012), pp. 119-128.

their demands and passed Law 180 banning construction of the TIPNIS highway and labeling the Park and “untouchable zone.”⁶

The TIPNIS conflict sparked the most significant crisis to date for the MAS government since it took power in 2006 and, as I will argue in this chapter, highlights the distinction between the political visions and material operations of hegemony and plurinationality specifically in relation to the extractive economy. The proposed TIPNIS highway is only part of a much longer historical process seeking to open up the eastern lowlands to colonization, the growth of infrastructure, agricultural expansion, and processes of accumulation and investment, i.e. national capitalist development. Thus, despite an initial appearance of a conflict over a particular infrastructure project, I argue the struggle over the TIPNIS highway illuminates the contrasting visions of development between hegemony and plurinationality. Furthermore, more than just a routine demonstration of force on the part of the state, the raid of the protesters’ encampment at Chaparina shows an attempt by the government to violently put an end to an oppositional movement while also revealing a rupture in the MAS hegemonic project. In this chapter I argue that the projects of hegemony and plurinationality specifically advance contrasting visions of development. Through an examination of the TIPNIS conflict, I employ the concepts of extractivism, accumulation by dispossession, and *vivir bien* (to live well), and analyze the practice of prior consultation and/or consent in order to show how these

⁶ Emily Achtenberg, “Contested Development: The Geopolitics of Bolivia’s TIPNIS Conflict,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 46:2 (2013), at <https://nacla.org/article/contested-development-geopolitics-bolivia%E2%80%99s-tipnis-conflict>.

two visions of development differ in practice and what that means in relation to the idea of social emancipation. While the projects of plurinationality and MAS hegemony both place social emancipation as a central goal of development, the manner in which it is achieved fundamentally differs.

Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure

Straddling the departments of Cochabamba and Beni, the TIPNIS is a triangular plot of territory covering roughly 1.2 million hectares. Before the colonial period, the Moxos who lived in the area had maintained commercial relations with the Incan empire in the highland altiplano. After the arrival of the Spanish, the Jesuits opened missions in the area during the 17th century in the towns of Loreto, Trinidad, and San Ignacio, among others. Under the colonial system, the Jesuits were able to manage the areas under their control in relative autonomy. While the goal was to proselytize the indigenous population, the Jesuits more or less respected the indigenous ownership of communal territory which helped to generate a certain level of social harmony.⁷ After the expulsion of the Jesuits by the Spanish Crown in 1767, the area fell under the direct control of the colonial government who attempted to exploit the population through the extraction of forced labor and a head tax. A similar system of exploitation followed through the republican period after Bolivia's independence in 1825, although the state's reach was never felt as intensely in the eastern lowlands as it was throughout the western valleys and altiplano. However,

⁷ Fundación Tierra, *Marcha indígena pro el TIPNIS*, p. 59.

during the middle 20th century, the Bolivian state sought to expand its control over the entire geographic area of the country and literally construct the nation through physical infrastructure, development projects, and internal migration policies.

The TIPNIS area was officially designated as a national park in 1965 under the military regime of René Barrientos. Pushing back against calls to open the area up through infrastructure development and increased highland colonization, Barrientos issued Supreme Decree 7401 in order to protect the area as “the construction of a road on the margins of the [Amazon] jungle and plans for colonization would put the integrity of the area’s natural resources at serious risk.”⁸ In response to the 1990 March for Territory and Dignity, President Jaime Paz Zamora decreed part of the TIPNIS as an indigenous territory of the Mojeño, Yuracaré, and Chimán (also known as Tsimané) peoples who lived in the area.⁹ In 1997, under the guise of the *Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria* (National Agrarian Reform Institute, INRA), the TIPNIS indigenous territory was given the legal status of a *Tierra Comunitaria de Origen* (Communal Indigenous Land, TCO) and covered over a million hectares. In 2009, the indigenous TCO received legal title and was renamed as a *Territorio Indígena Originario Campesino* (Indigenous, Original peoples, Peasant Territory, TIOC).

⁸ Quoted in Fundación Tierra, *Marcha indígena pro el TIPNIS*, p. 14.

⁹ According to the 1993 First Indigenous Census, of the 4,563 inhabitants of the TIPNIS, 68% were Mojeño, 26% Yuracaré, 4% Chimán, with the remaining 2% of other ethnic origin. See, Álvaro García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía: Poder hacendal-patrimonial y acumulación capitalista*, (La Paz: Vicepresidente del Estado Plurinacional, 2013), p. 39.

The economic activity of the Park's Mojeños, Yuracarés, and Chimanés inhabitants is largely subsistence-based and changes depending on the season. During the rainy season they produce small-scale agriculture, whereas during the dry season their activity is based on hunting and fishing. It is important to note that they are not completely sedentary peoples as they move throughout the territory of the Park in order to survive and reproduce their culture.¹⁰

Regardless of the Park's official establishment and its legal status as an indigenous territory, the area has not been immune to the eastward march of highland peasant colonizers in search of land. While the Barrientos regime may have allegedly tried to protect the natural environment and the rights of indigenous peoples in the area with the 1965 declaration of a national park, according to Yashar, "the state had little capacity (and probably little political will) to defend the park's boundaries and protect the indigenous communities therein from the new wave of Andean colonos."¹¹ Indeed, with the 1966 Colonization Law the state encouraged highland peasants to migrate east and colonize untitled areas, particularly in the Alto Beni, north of the TIPNIS, and Yapacani and the Chapare, southeast of the Park. Furthermore, in 1967 the Bolivian government created the *Instituto Nacional de Colonización* (National Institute of Colonization) to incentivize colonization in the eastern Amazonian lowlands through the distribution of land to those coming from the western highlands.

¹⁰ Sarela Paz, "El conflicto del Territorio Indígena Parque nacional Isiboro Sécore (TIPNIS) y sus consecuencias para el Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia," in Rafael Bautista et al., *La victoria Indígena del TIPNIS*, (La Paz: Autodeterminación, 2012), pp. 57-60; María José Muñoz, "El conflicto en torno al Territorio Indígena Parque nacional Isiboro Sécore: Un conflicto multidimensional," *Cultura y representaciones sociales*, 7:14 (2013), pp. 108-109.

¹¹ Deborah Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 206.

In the early 1970s, the *colonos* began to organize themselves in unions, under the *Confederación Sindical de Colonizadores de Bolivia* (Syndicalist Confederation of Bolivian Colonizers, CSCB), in order to push for further land distribution and for the development of infrastructure. Between 1967 and 1993, 3 to 5 million hectares of land were redistributed to roughly 80,000 families in areas surrounding the Park.¹²

Alongside the distribution of smallholder plots of land to highland campesino colonizers, the regime of General Hugo Banzer also sought to expand the agro-industrial sector through the distribution of large-scale landholdings to a small number of individuals during the 1970s.¹³ In many cases, these large landholdings, known as *neolatifundias*, had links to international capital or were foreign-owned outright. As Bottazzi and Rist note, “land distribution was used by Banzer’s military regime to satisfy a rich class of mainly foreign large-scale farmers and thereby establish ties with Western oligarchies.”¹⁴ As a result, land distribution throughout the eastern lowlands grew increasingly unequal as 40% of agricultural land was transferred to large enterprises that represented only 2% of all landowners.¹⁵

Increasingly, the TIPNIS itself came under migratory pressure, largely from the area south of the Park. As Aymara and Quechua highland campesinos colonized the valleys outside Cochabamba, producing cacao, bananas, cassava, maize, and coca,

¹² Fundación Tierra, *Marcha indígena pro el TIPNIS*, p. 14; Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*, p. 194.

¹³ Gabriela Valdivia, “Agrarian Capitalism and Struggles over Hegemony in the Bolivian Lowlands,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 37:4 (2010), pp. 67-87.

¹⁴ Patrick Bottazzi and Stephan Rist, “Changing Land Rights Means Changing Society: The Sociopolitical Effects of Agrarian Reforms under the Government of Evo Morales,” *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 12:4 (2012), p. 535.

¹⁵ Bottazzi and Rist, “Changing Land Rights Means Changing Society,” p. 535.

they contributed to the expansion of the agricultural frontier as their numbers grew increasingly larger throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In the early 1990s, the indigenous peoples in the TIPNIS and the *colonos* began a process of marking out the boundaries between indigenous lands within the Park on the one hand, and the area occupied by the peasant colonizers on the other. A “red line” marked the boundary between the two territories, with the colonizers in control of the area south of the Park, known as Polígono 7. This southern area is populated by some 20,000 *colono* families who are organized into 52 agrarian *sindicatos* (trade unions) affiliated with the *Federación del Trópico*, one of the six federations of coca producers of the Chapare whose leader continues to be Evo Morales. Colonization of the southern part of the Park has been so intense that the number of Aymara and Quechua colonizers from the Andes who reside in the Park now exceeds the number of Amazonian Indians residing there.¹⁶

Land, Organization, and Identity

A key distinction between the indigenous Park residents and the *colonos*, and a central issue of the highway conflict itself, revolves around the question of land tenure and social organization. According to McNiesh, “dividing the land into individual lots, these *colonos* have a distinct manner of land use compared to the communitarian structures of land use applied by the [indigenous] communities within

¹⁶ Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*, p. 206.

the park area.”¹⁷ For indigenous peoples throughout the Amazon region, land is viewed as a collective territory that serves to support communal subsistence activities like hunting, fishing, and foraging. For the highland Aymara and Quechua peasant colonizers, land should belong to those who put it to productive use. Now known as “*interculturales*,” the colonizers migrated east in search of more arable land after their *minifundios* (small parcels of land) secured through the 1953 Agrarian Reform gave way to parcelization over several generations to such an extent that many referred to their land holdings as *surcofundios* (a single row of crops). For some land-hungry highland peasants, lowland indigenous groups who control large tracts of seemingly idle land are seen as the new *latifundistas*. Thus, one important part of the TIPNIS highway controversy is a material conflict between two distinct cultural groups that both identify as indigenous. This conflict sheds light not only on divergent positions of these groups in relation to the TIPNIS highway, but also the ambiguities of indigenous subject formation and the difficulty we have as scholars of understanding and interpreting this process.

Some scholars and activists have interpreted this distinction in the system of land use in terms of indigeneity such that those who communally hold the land, are subsistence based, and have maintained their traditional forms of social organization (*ayllu*, *marka*, *capitanía*, etc.) are the authentic Indians, while those who view land in terms of smallholder private property, are more thoroughly integrated into the market, and have been organized on the basis of unionism are not really indigenous people.

¹⁷ John-Andrew McNeish, “Extraction, Protest and Indigeneity in Bolivia: The TIPNIS Effect,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 8:2 (2013), p. 225.

For instance, in an otherwise insightful and reflective piece on the notion of “strategic ethnicity” in relation to both the MAS government and indigenous movements’ attempts to mobilize ethnic identity as a political strategy, Rivera states, “even though the coca growers use the Indian flag [the *wiphala*] for their organization and they speak largely in Quechua, this is not enough to consider them ‘indigenous’” due to the fact that they want to open the TIPNIS up for colonization, separate the land into smallholder plots, and connect with the commodity chains of the global market.¹⁸ Clearly this is an argument that can easily lead into facile stereotypes and essentializations of what it means to be “indigenous.”¹⁹ Therefore, it is important to realize that these distinctions between varying groups are socio-political and contingent, not biological and inherent.

The problem arises when a concept like indigeneity is universalized, which obscures internal differentiation. Thus, one way of countering this tendency of essentializing indigenous identity is to understand the multiplicity within the category of indigeneity itself. Canessa, for instance, argues that in contemporary Bolivia there are two broad forms of indigeneity: “one sees indigenous people and values as the

¹⁸ Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Mito y desarrollo en Bolivia: El giro colonial del gobierno del MAS*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2015), p. 51.

¹⁹ For an excellent discussion on the construction of indigenous identity in Bolivia and Ecuador, see José Antonio Lucero, *Struggles of Voice: The Politics of Indigenous Representation in the Andes*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008). Critiquing the notion of an essential identity, Lucero calls our attention to the processes by which political identities are constructed both internally and relationally and through these processes become visible and representable. He states, “the subject of representation is always contingent and contested, even when certain formations become dominant... Representation (political or otherwise), has what Foucault and others would call a productive role in fabricating the very thing it supposedly represents.... [W]hatever the subject of representation has been (e.g. interest, will, or popular sovereignty), it has not existed prior to the particular machinery of representation, but was produced with and in part, by that machinery. The political subject itself is a product of representation” (32).

foundation of the nation-state and seeks to create an ecumenical indigeneity for a majority of Bolivia's citizens, and the other seeks to respect cultural difference in its multiple forms and protection of marginal peoples *from* the state."²⁰ This latter group, whose discourse is more about autonomy and territorial control, Canessa labels as "territorialized." The former group, who are much more interested in a Bolivian national identity which puts themselves at the center and who argue the nation's resources should be exploited for their benefit in particular, are labeled "deterritorialized."²¹

While Canessa is discussing different indigenous identities in contemporary Bolivia, a similar argument was made by Albó in relation to the downfall of the Military-Peasant Pact in the late 1970s and the rise of a newly independent indigenous peasant organization out of Katarismo. Highlighting two distinct tendencies in this movement, Albó notes, "the first tendency has been that of winning autonomous terrain in the face of a state considered inefficient.... a theoretically symmetrical, although subordinate, relationship regulated by an implicit contract between an autonomous body (the ayllu) and the state. The peasant project, then, appears to point to a plurinational state. The second tendency seeks full participation in the state as a means of controlling the government."²² Here, then, we can see at least two general subtypes of what it means to be indigenous in Bolivia that help to

²⁰ Andrew Canessa, "Conflict, claim and contradiction in the new 'indigenous' state of Bolivia," *Critique of Anthropology*, 34:2 (2014), p. 168.

²¹ Canessa, "Conflict, claim and contradiction in the new 'indigenous' state of Bolivia," p. 160.

²² Xavier Albó, "From MNRistas to Kataristas to Katari," in Steve J. Stern (ed.), *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World: 18th to 20th Centuries*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 408-409.

shed light on the TIPNIS conflict by highlighting a general set of distinctive demands for differing indigenous groups. Whereas the highland indigenous colonizers may be “deterritorialized,”²³ seeking a plot of land to be put to productive use through market exchange, and hold a will to power, or a desire to hegemonic control the state, to *be* the state; lowland indigenous peoples in the TIPNIS, on the other hand, are “territorialized” and view territory not necessarily as a productive commodity but rather as a necessity for both their subsistence and the material and cosmological survival of their culture. Additionally, while they may have a will to local power, they seek a certain level of autonomy from the state, or to *be a part of* a plurinational state.²⁴

But, the question then arises as to why certain indigenous groups make certain claims (e.g. control over territory, autonomy, plurinationality) while other indigenous groups make different claims (access to land, state power, hegemony)? According to McNeish, in order to understand contrasting demands emanating from different indigenous groups we need to analyze these groups’ contrasting historical relations with the state and economic markets. He argues that “attention needs to be given to

²³ Specifically discussing the coca growing *colonos*, Canessa states, “coca growers are thus one of several groups of people – landless peasants, urban people, highland colonists to the lowlands – who originate in ‘traditional’ indigenous communities and have an historical consciousness of racism and injustice but who nevertheless do not identify closely with the lifeways and cultural values of their communities of origin.” See, Canessa, “Conflict, claim and contradiction in the new ‘indigenous’ state of Bolivia,” p. 161.

²⁴ It should be pointed out that this dichotomy of territorialized and deterritorialized does not exclusively align with a regional distinction between lowland and highland indigenous peoples. CONAMAQ, for instance, would be considered a territorialized highland organization that views territory as necessary for the material and ideological survival of culture through the reconstitution of the pre-colonial *ayllu*, a reterritorialization of a deterritorialized post-colonial state. See, Pavlína Springerová and Barbora Vališková, “Territoriality in the development policy of Evo Morales’ government and its impacts on the rights of indigenous people: the case of TIPNIS,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 41:2, (2015) pp. 152-153.

the particular historic linkages of Bolivian indigenous communities to extractive industries and global commodity markets, and the manner in which national economic and political transformations have squeezed ethnic and class identities together.”²⁵ Historically, indigenous groups in the highlands have been much more integrated into the state since the colonial period. Furthermore, highland indigenous peoples benefitted much more from the 1953 Agrarian Reform as the breakup of the hacienda system led to the redistribution of land. And, as we can see from the discussion above, highland Aymara and Quechua colonizers have participated in and benefitted from state-directed migration schemes that sought to “colonize the jungle.” Finally, highland groups have historically been more connected to the commodity market than their lowland counterparts and have relied more on commercial activity to reproduce themselves. In contrast, from the perspective of lowland Indians, the state has mostly been a force encroaching on their territory through processes of colonization, the expansion of capitalist agro-industrial farming, logging and rubber tapping, and the growth in large-scale cattle farming. In all these cases, lowland indigenous groups’ territory and thus their way of life has been threatened by invasion from the outside.

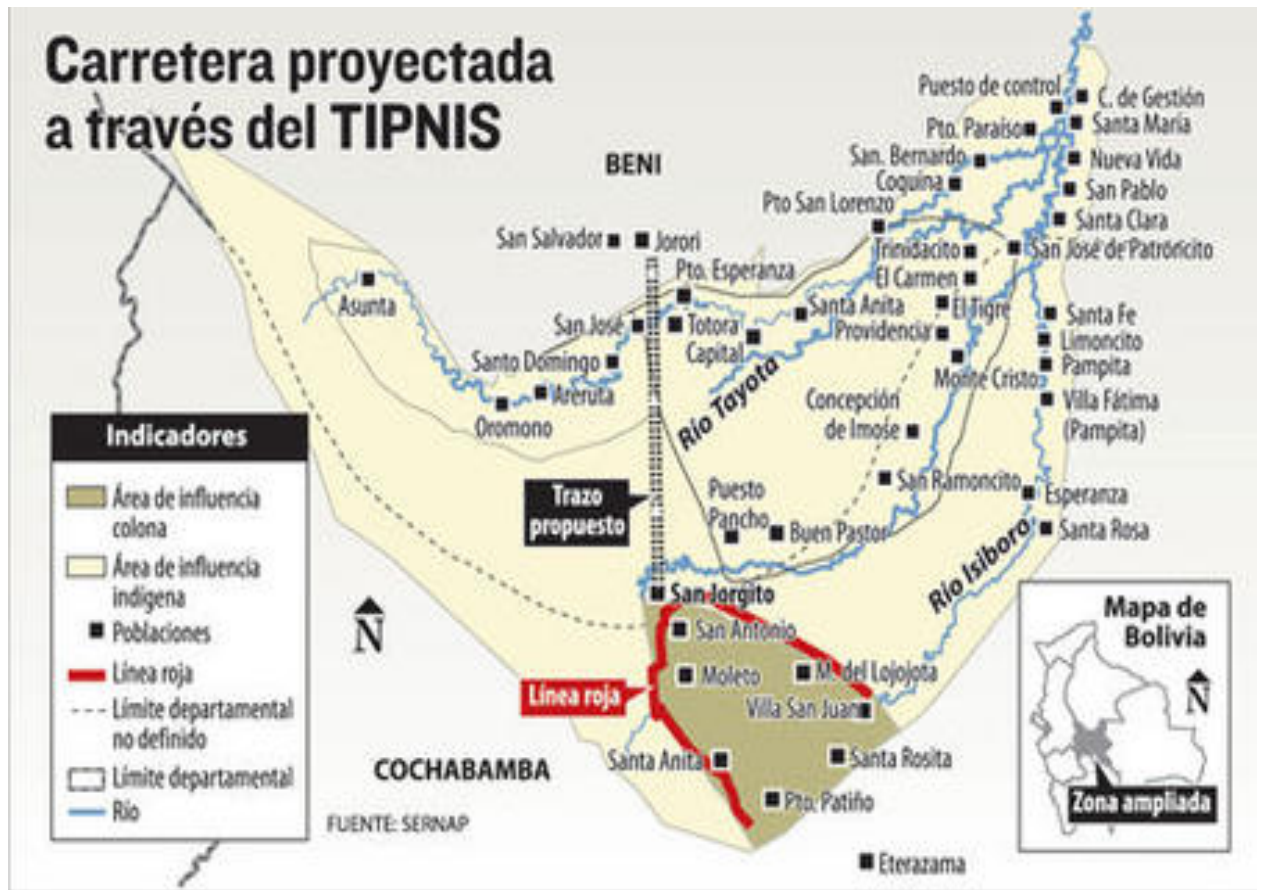
Despite these differing historical trajectories, it is also important to recognize that highland and lowland indigenous groups’ histories are intertwined and embedded in one another. The connections and conflicts between indigenous lowland territorialized groups and deterritorialized highland groups within the TIPNIS are just

²⁵ McNeish, “Extraction, Protest and Indigeneity in Bolivia,” p. 234.

one example of how these relations help to define the identity of each group. As McNeish points out, “the TIPNIS is a space where, as a result of population movements necessitated by a wider political economic history, the cultural logics of both the highlands and the lowlands collide.”²⁶

To fully comprehend the TIPNIS conflict we need to understand the differences between certain groups of indigenous peoples in Bolivia. But, in order to understand these differences, it is necessary to realize the distinct histories that these groups have had with the state and the economy. In order to do so, in the following sections I will use the concept of extractivism as developed by Svampa and Gudynas to understand the mode of accumulation in contemporary MAS-led Bolivia and to analyze the distinct relations between indigenous groups and the economic market, which will help to clarify their differing visions of development. I will then interrogate the idea of prior consultation in order to further understand these groups’ visions with a specific focus on their relationship with the state in the process of development.

²⁶ McNeish, “Extraction, Protest and Indigeneity in Bolivia,” p. 234.



Map 1. Source: *La Razon*

Building the Nation, One Road at a Time

The proposed section of the Villa Tunari-San Ignacio de Moxos road (see Map 1) would traverse the Park from north to south directly to the northern point of Polígono 7, the area under *colono* control. Officially, the Morales' government argued that the road would play a central role in the historic process of integrating the country by physically connecting eastern Amazonia with the western Andes. It would also expand the territorial reach and power of the state, which would in turn help to protect and bring about economic development to those indigenous groups in

the TIPNIS area. Perhaps less explicit but no less clear, the road between Trinidad and Cochabamba would also provide an alternative to the main existing route between eastern and western Bolivia through the city of Santa Cruz, the country's most dynamic economic hub and the stronghold of the government's opposition, thus confronting the eastern elite opposition's power.

According to the MAS government's position, the historical need for a road connecting the Andean zone with the Amazon region dates back more than 300 years.²⁷ In 1763, the *Real Audiencia de Charcas* ordered that a route connecting Cochabamba with Moxos (contemporary Beni) be established to facilitate the rapid transportation of troops in order to keep the Portuguese from further invading Spanish territory. In 1825, after Bolivia gained its independence, residents of Cochabamba were consulted as to the most pressing issues that could be taken to improve the area, to which they replied a route between Cochabamba and Moxos. In 1915, settlers in the Beni sent a letter to the President of Bolivia asking for a road to be built between Trinidad and Cochabamba. In 1920, President Bautista Saavedra ordered a route to be constructed from Cochabamba to Moxos, although for some reason the troops commanded to build the road were reassigned to a different route connecting Cochabamba with Santa Cruz. During the Chaco War (1932-35) various rivers between the Beni and the Chapare were used to transport troops from the northern Amazon region to the southern Chaco. In 1998, the Yucumo-San Borja-San Ignacio-Trinidad section was officially declared a fundamental route, and in 2003 the

²⁷ The following is drawn from García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, pp. 53-58.

National Highway Service declared the Villa Tunari – San Ignacio a complementary route to the Fundamental Network of Highways. Also in 2003, President Carlos Mesa authorized a search to fund the construction and paving of the highway between Cochabamba and Trinidad. In 2006, under the government of Evo Morales, Law 3477 established once again the construction of a highway as a national priority. Thus, according to García Linera, the MAS effort to construct a road between Cochabamba and Trinidad is only the latest effort in a long historic struggle to integrate Bolivia’s national territory under the control of the state by linking the Amazon region with the Andes. “The Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos highway will establish the presence of the Bolivian State in the Amazon where, in its absence, the ones who actually hold power are landlords and lumber companies (many of them foreigners)” argues García Linera. “The highway will act as a staple that unites two regions of the country separated from one another, whose dissociation precisely permitted the loss of territories a century ago, and more recently has allowed the substitution of the State for illegal actors, *hacendados* and foreigners. The highway will act as a mechanism of geographic territorial control by the State and the establishment of national sovereignty.”²⁸

The expansion of Bolivian state power throughout the Amazon region, according to García Linera, will help put an end to the patrimonial rule of large landowners over the indigenous peoples in the area and challenge foreign capitalist imperialism. He argues, “the main enemy of the State as a protector in the Amazon

²⁸ García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, pp. 59-60.

region is the international imperial-corporate structure,” and “the absence of the State in terms of rights and protections has given way to the formation of despotic-*hacendado* power over the indigenous peoples and communities and the penetration of foreign powers that, in the name of ‘protecting the Amazon,’ ‘the lungs of the world,’ etc., have extended an extraterritorial control – through some environmentalist NGOs – over the Amazonian region.”²⁹

However, the discourse of the state as a guarantor and protector of the rights of indigenous peoples has a long history in the Bolivian Amazon.³⁰ As an argument in defense of the TIPNIS highway, Silvia Rivera notes that this type of discourse exemplifies “how the hegemonic nation reproduces... forms of ‘colonial administration’ of the territory and the population that reduce the inhabitants of the Park to mere objects, domesticated and passive.”³¹ Lowland indigenous groups have historically been viewed as “savages” and “backward” and were considered to be wards of the state up until the 1970s. Even after Bolivia’s 1952 revolution that extended citizenship rights to many indigenous people who were previously ignored and/or excluded, Amazonian Indians were still not seen as full-fledged citizens. For example, the 1953 agrarian reform law stated that “forest groups of the tropical and

²⁹ García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, p. 60.

³⁰ García Linera’s own position on the role of the state in Bolivian society in general, and in relation with the country’s indigenous peoples in particular, has fundamentally shifted from his earlier writings and those produced during his time as vicepresident in the MAS government. See, Bruno Bosteels, “Puede pensarse hoy la actualidad del comunismo? Reflexiones en torno al pensamieto teórico de Álvaro García Linera,” *Revista Boliviana de Investigación*, 10:1 2013, pp. 293-323.

³¹ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Mito y desarrollo en Bolivia*, p. 32.

subtropical plain that find themselves in a savage state and that have a primitive form of organization, will remain under the protection of the State.”³²

Supporters of the highway expressed similar tropes of the “indigenous savage” during the TIPNIS conflict. Roberto Coraite, the leader of the *Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* (CSUTCB), the country’s national peasant confederation and a main base of support for the MAS, declared that “we need to differentiate between what will provide the most benefits to our brothers in the TIPNIS; the highway or remain clandestine, remain indigent...remain, that is to say, as savages.... We do not want the indigenous of the TIPNIS to continue to live as savages any longer.”³³ From this perspective, the road signifies “progress” and “development” and its construction would help those indigenous communities of the TIPNIS overcome their alleged state of backwardness and barbarity. Yet, this argument completely negates the validity of the various modes of indigenous life, which is key to the idea of plurinationality, and, according to Rivera, “denies the inhabitants of the 66 communities of the TIPNIS their rights to territory, to their own forms of producing, signifying, and representing the world, and to self-government.”³⁴

Development and Its Discontents: Extractivism, Accumulation, and *Vivir Bien*

³² Cited in Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*, p. 194.

³³ Quoted in *La Razon*, September 7, 2011.

³⁴ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Mito y desarrollo en Bolivia*, p. 50.

According to Eduardo Gudynas, with the rise of the Pink Tide throughout Latin America combined with a boom in commodities prices, the region is undergoing a new period of heightened natural resource extraction.³⁵ Historically, Latin America's insertion into the global economy has been as a provider of primary products, so continued economic concentration on the extraction and exportation of natural resources is not a new phenomenon. However, what is new during the contemporary phase is that progressive forces control state power and they have sought to reinsert the state as a central actor in the economy. With their new economic role, these states have sought to increase their share of profit from the extractive economy and redistribute it to society through various social programs. But, as Gudynas points out, extractive activities increase environmental destruction and heighten social conflict between the winners and losers of the processes of extractivism.³⁶ This creates a contradiction where "the State looks to capture the surplus from extractivism and use part of it to fund social programs, which increases the State's legitimacy that can then be used to defend extractive activities."³⁷ Social programs, such as conditional cash transfers, and increased government investment in health and education based largely on Bolivia's extractive model of accumulation have improved livelihoods and helped to legitimize the MAS government. Since 2006, when Morales came to power, the size of the country's economy has tripled, poverty

³⁵ Eduardo Gudynas, "El nuevo extractivismo progresista en America del Sur," in *Colonialismos del Siglo XXI: Negocios extractivos y defensa del territorio en América Latina*, (Barcelona: Icaria Editores, 2011), pp. 75-92.

³⁶ Gudynas, "El nuevo extractivismo progresista en America del Sur," p. 83.

³⁷ Gudynas, "El nuevo extractivismo progresista en America del Sur," p. 85.

has been cut in half, and income inequality has declined from 58.7 to 48.4, as measured by the Gini index.³⁸ It is within this context that the “compensatory state” is pushing to build a highway through the TIPNIS to expand the extractivist model in order to maintain Bolivia’s economic growth.³⁹

But, what does *extractivism* actually mean, and how is it possible to classify the building of a highway through the TIPNIS as being part of the extractive economy? Extractivism, according to Alberto Acosta, is a mode of accumulation that assigns certain roles to different regions of the globe in the processes of material production which began during the developmental phases of global capitalism in the 15th and 16th centuries through the colonization of the Americas. For Acosta, extractivism “refers to those activities which remove large quantities of natural resources that are not processed (or processed only to a limited degree), especially for export. Extractivism is not limited to minerals or oil. Extractivism is also present in farming, forestry and even fishing.”⁴⁰ He goes on to argue that the extractivist mode of accumulation has always been determined “by the demands of the metropolitan centers of nascent capitalism. Some regions specialized in the extraction and production of raw materials – primary commodities – while others took on the role of producing manufactured goods. The former export Nature, the latter import it.”⁴¹

³⁸ Linda Farthing and Benjamin Kohl, *Evo’s Bolivia: Continuity and Change*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), pp. 144-145.

³⁹ Jeffrey R. Webber, *The Last Day of Oppression, and the First Day of the Same: The Politics and Economics of the New Latin American Left*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), pp. 107-109.

⁴⁰ Alberto Acosta, “Extractivism and neoextractivism: two sides of the same curse,” in Miriam Lang and Dunia Mokrani (eds.), *Beyond Development: Alternative visions from Latin America*, (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute/Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2013), p. 62.

⁴¹ Acosta, “Extractivism and neoextractivism,” p. 62.

From a similar perspective, according to Maristella Svampa extractivism can be defined as a

type of accumulation based on an over-exploitation of – largely non-renewable – natural resources as well as the expansion of frontiers to territories formerly considered ‘unproductive.’ This definition of an economy based on extraction is not limited to activities normally falling into the category (oil and mining), but also includes other sectors such as agribusiness or the production of biofuels. This is due to the fact that they consolidate a model that tends to follow a monoculture, the destruction of biodiversity, a concentration of landownership and a destructive reconfiguration of vast territories. In addition, it includes the transport infrastructure projects (waterways, harbors, bi-oceanic corridors, and so on), energy projects (large hydro dams) and communication infrastructure projects....

Thus, more than just the actual physical extraction of natural resources, the concept of extractivism draws our attention to an entire model of accumulation that includes the expansion of industrial agriculture for export, such as soy and palm oil, and also the construction of the physical infrastructure necessary to support those extractivist industries.

An example of an extractivist program is the *Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana* (IIRSA, Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America), a plan that multiple South American governments agreed to in 2000 with the goal of facilitating the extraction and exportation of products, in many cases with little value added. As one section of a larger IIRSA highway project reaching from southeastern Brazil to the Chilean port of Arica, the section through the TIPNIS in Bolivia is a key intermediary link. The details of the planned highway were drawn up in 2008 between Brazil and Bolivia and the price of construction was established at \$415 million, 80 percent of which

was to be funded by the *Banco Nacional de Desarrollo Económico y Social*, Brazil's national development bank. Along with the financing, the Brazilian construction company OAS was awarded the contract to build the highway.⁴² It was argued by critics of the plan that the road was a reflection of the rising economic power of Brazil and would, as a consequence, induce the expansion of Brazilian agro-industrial capital into Bolivia.⁴³

Putting aside the international scope of the TIPNIS highway, more important for the purposes of this chapter are the domestic politics of the conflict surrounding the model of extractivism. In addition to the expansion of Brazilian agro-industry, the highway would induce further colonization of indigenous territory by coca growers in the south, which continue to be the largest base of rural support for Morales and the MAS.⁴⁴ The highway would also lead to the extension of large-scale cattle farming from the north, and increased logging operations (both legal and illegal) throughout the Park.⁴⁵ Additionally, the Park and surrounding areas have

⁴² Jeffrey R. Webber, "Revolution against 'progress': the TIPNIS struggle and class contradictions in Bolivia," *International Socialism*, 133 (2012), at <http://isj.org.uk/the-tipnis-struggle-and-class-contradictions-in-bolivia/>. For a discussion of the IIRSA in relation to Brazilian imperialism in Bolivia, see Paco Gómez Nadal, "La soberanía en juego o el proyecto subimperial de Brasil," in *TIPNIS: Amazonia en resistencia contra el Estado colonial en Bolivia*, (Santander, España: Editorial Otramérica, 2013), pp. 181-191.

⁴³ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Mito y desarrollo en Bolivia*, p. 52; Waltraud Q. Morales, "The TIPNIS Crisis and the Meaning of Bolivian Democracy Under Evo Morales," 59th Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Council of Latin American Studies, March 29-31, 2012, pp. 3,7.

⁴⁴ Patricia Chavez and Marxa Chavez, "TIPNIS: el reposicionamiento de las luchas sociales en Bolivia," in Rafael Bautista et al., *La victoria Indígena del TIPNIS*, (La Paz: Autodeterminacion, 2012), pp. 69-94.

⁴⁵ María José Muñoz, "El conflicto en torno al Territorio Indígena Parque nacional Isiboro Sécore: Un conflicto multidimensional," *Cultura y representaciones sociales*, 7:14 (2013); Francisco López Bárcenas, "Acumulación por desposesión y autonomía indígena," in *TIPNIS: Amazonia en resistencia contra el Estado colonial en Bolivia*, (Santander, España: Editorial Otramérica, 2013), pp. 135-142; Rivera Cusicanqui, *Mito y desarrollo en Bolivia*, p. 52.

been identified as possible sites of oil and natural gas exploration. According to the *Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Laboral y Agrario* (Center for the Study of Agrarian and Labor Development, CEDLA), one third of the Park has been marked out in government development plans as areas for potential oil and gas extraction.⁴⁶ Continually expanding the extractive frontier is seen as the central means of ensuring that there are sufficient state funds to cover the government's increased social expenditures. As such, "there is a policy-driven demand to expand current levels of [oil and natural gas] production and to look for new fields that can be exploited. The road would, as many environmental organizations in the country suggest, be an important first step in ensuring access to the currently isolated areas where these blocks are found."⁴⁷ Overall, through the activities noted above, a study from the *Programa de Investigación Estratégica en Bolivia* (Program of Strategic Investigation, PIEB) claims that approximately 600,000 hectares of the TIPNIS, or about 65% of the Park, will be deforested within 20 years of the highway's construction.⁴⁸

The highway, then, would serve to extend and deepen the extractive economy while also accelerating the process of what Marx called "primitive accumulation" and what Harvey has reformulated as "accumulation by dispossession." Primitive accumulation, according to Marx, is the "original sin" of capitalism; it is "an

⁴⁶ Cited in Springerová and Vališková, "Territoriality in the development policy of Evo Morales' government and its impacts on the rights of indigenous people," p. 150.

⁴⁷ McNeish, "Extraction, Protest and Indigeneity in Bolivia," p. 226.

⁴⁸ PIEB, *Viabilidad económica e institucional para el desarrollo de iniciativas que reduzcan la deforestación en el Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécuré*, (La Paz: PIEB, 2011), p. 59.

accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure.”⁴⁹ In other words, primitive accumulation is the originary process of expropriation of non-capitalist forms of production by the expanding forces of capital. In a famous passage, Marx states “the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.”⁵⁰ Marx’s discussion of primitive accumulation includes descriptions of various instances of the process, including the separation of peasants from their land, suppression of the commons, the slave trade, and colonialism, amongst others. “Primitive accumulation, therefore,” Marx states, “is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears ‘primitive’ because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital.”⁵¹

However, as Harvey points out, a fundamental assumption of this Marxist position (and, he adds, classical liberal political economy) is that after these “original” processes have taken place continued capitalist accumulation and reproduction proceeds under new, distinct conditions and the primitive phase is no

⁴⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), p. 873.

⁵⁰ Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, p. 915.

⁵¹ Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, pp. 874-875.

longer applicable.⁵² Harvey sees things differently and, in order to highlight the persistence of the predatory practices of primitive accumulation within the long historical process of capital accumulation and the ongoing processes of incorporating previously non-capitalist modes of production into the sphere of capitalism, he employs the concept of “accumulation by dispossession.” Building on Marx’s idea of primitive accumulation, Harvey describes accumulation by dispossession as

the continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices which Marx had treated as “primitive” or “original” during the rise of capitalism. These include the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations (compare the cases, described above, of Mexico and of China, where 70 million peasants are thought to have been displaced in recent times); conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights (most spectacularly represented by China); suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; the slave trade (which continues particularly in the sex industry); and usury, the national debt and, most devastating of all, the use of the credit system as a radical means of accumulation by dispossession.⁵³

We can therefore see how the TIPNIS highway might operate to extend the logic of (extractive) capitalism through expanded land colonization and coca production, oil and gas exploitation, increased agro-industrial activities, and deforestation.⁵⁴ In other words, we can see the proposed highway and its corollary effects as a process of accumulation by dispossession.

⁵² David Harvey, “The ‘New’ Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession,” *Socialist Register*, 40 (2004), pp. 73-74.

⁵³ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 159.

⁵⁴ López Bárcenas, “Acumulación por desposesión y autonomía indígena,” pp. 135-142.

Yet, for García Linera, the argument that the highway will somehow extend the extractive economy is wrong for a number of reasons. For example, he states that the notion of a “cocalero invasion” of the Park is an outright fallacy. Despite the fact that there is currently no type of coercive measure that prevents the cocaleros from using the existing road infrastructure to enter the Park, they do not do so. Moreover, he argues, it was the cocaleros themselves that agreed in 1990 to a “red line” within the Park that they voluntarily agreed not to cross and they have kept their word.⁵⁵ He states “the highway will not be a spearhead for any supposed ‘cocalero invasion’; nor with any of the existing sections has any ‘invasion’ occurred, because this is a Park an a territory of collective indigenous ownership.”⁵⁶ There is some truth to this position, but his argument clearly ignores the history of land colonization in the region beginning in the 1960s and the increasing cocalero encroachment on Park lands.⁵⁷

More importantly, García Linera takes on the argument that the road represents an expansion of the extractive economy that will destroy the natural environment and keep Bolivia in its dependent position within global capitalism. He argues, “human activity is possible only through the transformation of the natural world.... Natural and social life necessitates processing nature in order to extract the biological components of its reproduction....The human being by nature transforms and affects the surrounding natural world; that is the invariable and transhistorical

⁵⁵ García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, p. 73.

⁵⁶ García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, pp. 73-74.

⁵⁷ See Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*, pp. 205-

condition of any mode of production.”⁵⁸ García Linera is pointing out that regardless of the mode of production (agrarian, feudal, capitalist, etc.), all human societies drastically affect and modify the natural environment through some form of extraction. “All societies and modes of production have in their own way distinct levels processing ‘raw materials.’ If we conceptualize ‘extractivism’ as the activity that just extracts primary materials (renewable or nonrenewable), without introducing greater transformation in the labor activity, then all societies of the world, capitalist and non-capitalist, are more or less extractivist.”⁵⁹ He is correct to point out that global capitalism, because it is in fact a *global* system, sets the limits and conditions of possibility for the horizon of social and economic transformation within any particular country. For this very reason it is important to remember that Bolivia will not be able to implement “socialism in one country” or radically transform the global division of labor and mode of production on its own. But, García Linera’s assertion that all hitherto societies’ modes of production are extractivist because they extract natural resources and transform nature essentially equates the concept of “extractivism” with the verb “to extract,” therefore missing the nuance of the concept extractivism itself and the fundamental critique of the extractivist model of contemporary capitalism.⁶⁰ It is not the fact that societies have an organic relation with their natural surroundings that is the question. The question is really about power and who benefits from any specific socio-environmental relationship.

⁵⁸ García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, p. 98.

⁵⁹ García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, pp. 100-101.

⁶⁰ Raúl Prada, *Miseria de la geopolítica: Crítica a la geopolítica extractivista*, (La Paz: Bolpress, 2012), p. 16.

According to critics, the extractivist model overwhelmingly benefits transnational capital at the expense of national actors, while producing ever more isolated enclave sectors within the national economy.⁶¹ The model of development based on the extraction and exportation of primary resources often fails to integrate those export activities with the rest of the economy and society. Kaup has demonstrated how Bolivia's dependence on natural resources has shaped both the physical infrastructure of the country and the institutional and regulatory structure where laws, taxes, contracts, and administration all operate to the advantage of the export sector, constraining internal economic diversification.⁶² In cases like this, the productive apparatus relies almost entirely on external actors and, as a consequence, remains vulnerable to the fluctuations of the global market.⁶³ The complete reliance on the global market can have profoundly negative impacts. For example, development economists have brought attention to the "paradox of plenty" or "Dutch disease" whereby investment flows into extracting sectors increase at the expense of other economic sectors.⁶⁴ This over-investment in one area leads to a general decrease in the production of other tradable goods, which are increasingly imported. When the price of the primary resource export inevitably falls, due to the volatility that characterizes the prices of raw materials, the economy goes into recession based

⁶¹ See William I. Robinson, *Latin America and Global Capitalism: A Critical Globalization Perspective*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

⁶² Brent Kaup, "A Neoliberal Nationalization? The Constraints on Natural Gas-Led Development in Bolivia," *Latin American Perspectives*, 37:3 (2010), pp. 123-138.

⁶³ Acosta, "Extractivism and neoextractivism," p. 65.

⁶⁴ See, for instance, Joseph Stiglitz, *Making Globalization Work*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), pp. 133-160; Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 38-53.

on the fact that other sectors have already been debilitated.⁶⁵ Additionally, extractive industries are capital-intensive and tend to generate little employment, although the jobs they do create are well paid.⁶⁶ As such, Acosta argues “this [extractivist] mode of accumulation does not require a domestic market and does not even need it.”⁶⁷

In his defense of the TIPNIS highway, García Linera also presents a linear vision of history where it is only through an extractive phase can a country then move on (i.e. develop) toward an industrial phase. But, as Acosta argues, “in practice, extractivism has been a mechanism of colonial and neocolonial plunder and appropriation.”⁶⁸ Moreover, as Prada points out, García Linera’s stagist perspective “does not capture the simultaneity and complexity of the processes [of economic change and development], it does not see that extractivism is not the condition of possibility for industrialization; it never was, they are distinct processes whose conditions of historical possibility are different.”⁶⁹ García Linera’s argument aligns with the modernization thesis put forward by classical liberal political economists that development (as it is understood in its Euro-Western iteration, i.e. endless economic growth and increased consumption) depends on the previous accumulation of capital and its sound investment in order to accumulate yet more surplus capital, which is to be reinvested and on and on in a virtuous cycle.⁷⁰ That countries pass through different periods of development is not at issue, this is clearly the case historically

⁶⁵ Acosta, “Extractivism and neoextractivism,” p. 64.

⁶⁶ Farthing and Kohl, *Evo’s Bolivia: Continuity and Change*, p. 81.

⁶⁷ Acosta, “Extractivism and neoextractivism,” p. 69.

⁶⁸ Acosta, “Extractivism and neoextractivism,” p. 63.

⁶⁹ Prada, *Miseria de la geopolítica*, p. 16.

⁷⁰ The classical example of this modernization thesis is W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

speaking. But, the question is *why* and/or *how* they do so. For the MAS government, Bolivia needs to exploit the natural resources at its disposal in order to accumulate capital and, in turn, invest in the industrialization of the country. And, due to the fact that there is not a national bourgeoisie to fulfill this role, the state will step in and fill this void in order to accumulate and invest in the universal interest of all Bolivians. But, while the increased role of the state in the economy is an important difference from the previous neoliberal era, the overall model of development and mode of accumulation essentially remain the same: extractivist. Extractivism, according to Gudnyas, “is part of South America’s own contemporary version of developmentalism, whereby the myth of progress and development is maintained under a new cultural and political hybridity.”⁷¹

Yet, according to Morales and the MAS, Bolivia’s reliance on an extractive mode of accumulation is a transitional phase on the path toward development that can only be ultimately overcome through increased extraction. “Extractivism is not a goal in and of itself,” García Linera argues, “but it can be the starting point for overcoming it.”⁷² Through the extraction of raw materials the Bolivian state generates and distributes wealth to enhance the material strength of the revolutionary social forces that, in turn, “creates a new material non-extractivist base that preserves and amplifies the benefits of the laboring population.”⁷³ Shuttering the mines, closing the gas wells, and shutting down the construction of highways and mega-dams, the

⁷¹ Quoted in Acosta, “Extractivism and neoextractivism,” p. 73.

⁷² García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, p. 107.

⁷³ García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, p. 108.

state would tie its hands in the revolutionary process and be unable to satisfy the basic material means of existence of the people. “Like any emancipation, to escape extractivism we have to start from it... At present, for us as a country, this is the only technical means we have to distribute the material wealth generated through extractivism (although, in a different way from previous eras), and in addition allow us to have the material, technical, and cognitive conditions to transform its technical and productive base.”⁷⁴

For critics of extractivism, however, increased extraction leads only to the expansion of capitalism, environmental degradation, and growing social inequality and exclusion. A model of post-extractivist development put forward as a challenge to extractive capitalism is represented through the concept of *vivir bien*. Meaning “to live well,” *vivir bien* is the Spanish translation of a concept that is rooted in the worldviews and ontologies of Bolivia’s indigenous peoples.⁷⁵ Despite the fact that the concept is “in permanent construction and reproduction,” it should not be understood merely as a “development alternative,” but rather as “an alternative to

⁷⁴ García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, p. 108.

⁷⁵ In Bolivia the term is *vivir bien*, whereas in other countries such as Ecuador and Peru the term is *buen vivir*. As scholars have pointed out, the translation of *vivir bien*/*buen vivir* as an umbrella term in Spanish from various indigenous languages (e.g. the Aymara *suma qamaña*, the Quechua *sumak kawsay*, the Guaraní *ñandereco*, among others) is problematic due to the plural ontological worldviews from which the concept comes. The idea has also been translated as *vida plena* (a full life), *vida en armonía* (to live in harmony), *convivir bien* (to live well together) in order to grasp the various aspects of the original indigenous conceptualizations where “men and women, together with nature, are part of the Mother Earth and there is a communion and dialogue between them mediated by rituals in which Nature is understood as a sacred being.” See Raúl Prada, “Buen Vivir as a model for state and economy,” in Miriam Lang and Dunia Mokrani (eds.), *Beyond Development: Alternative visions from Latin America*, (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute/Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2013), p. 145.

development.”⁷⁶ If the concept of development from Western modernity is assumed to imply things like progress, advancing forward, and uninterrupted growth as measured through the possession of material goods, then to simply “to live well” is a direct challenge to the developmentalist idea of always “living better.” Thus, *vivir bien* is a rejection of a number of ideas and practices of modern Western developmental thought. Whereas modern Western ontology is dual, creating a division between nature and society and presenting the former as an endless supply of material resources for the benefit of the latter, the ontology of *vivir bien* is relational, meaning “nature” is not an object simply existing as an entity external to humans for the exploitation and development of “society,” but rather that these two ostensibly distinct spheres can only exist in their relation with one another.⁷⁷

For Villalba, “to ‘live well’ is to live in solidarity, equality, harmony, complementarity and reciprocity. It is contrary to the consumerism, competition, opulence and profiteering that are the hallmarks of capitalism.”⁷⁸ However, while *vivir bien* is fundamentally based on the notions of complementarity and reciprocity, this does not ignore the fact of social struggle or presuppose the existence of some everlasting perpetual peace. *Vivir bien*, Acosta argues, “does not negate the existence of conflicts, but it does not exacerbate them by pretending that society is organized around the permanent and unequal accumulation of material goods, driven by endless

⁷⁶ Alberto Acosta, *El Buen Vivir: Sumak Kawsay, una oportunidad para imaginar otros mundos*, (Barcelona: Icaria editorial, 2013), 51, 50.

⁷⁷ See, Arturo Escobar, “*Sentipensar con la Tierra: Las Luchas Territoriales y la Dimensión Ontológica de las Espistemologías del Sur*,” *Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*, 11:1 (2016), pp. 11-32.

⁷⁸ Unai Villalba, “Buen Vivir vs Development: a paradigm shift in the Andes?” *Third World Quarterly*, 34:8 (2013), p. 1431.

competition among human beings.”⁷⁹ From this perspective, other human beings are not seen as an existential threat or viewed as subjects to be defeated and dominated in a zero sum game of survival.

To a certain extent, then, the model of *vivir bien* shares a number of similarities with the idea of the “moral economy” developed by E.P. Thompson, James Scott, and others.⁸⁰ In contrast to the capitalist market economy, the moral economy, like *vivir bien*, functions not just on the economic imperative of profit maximization and surplus accumulation, but on other social assumptions about what types of economic exchange are considered moral and ethical. The implementation of *vivir bien* would involve exchanging the market system for one that subjects the economy to certain social and political criteria that would guarantee sustenance, reproduction, and subsistence for everyone.⁸¹ Similarly, the moral economy, according to Thompson, “operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking, etc. [i.e. economic exchange]. This in its turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations.”⁸² One of those traditional social norms and obligations that the moral economy shares with *vivir bien* is the notion of *reciprocity*. The moral economy’s “idea of justice and legitimacy,” according to Scott, “is provided by the *norm of reciprocity* and the consequent elite obligation (that is,

⁷⁹ Acosta, *El Buen Vivir*, p. 53.

⁸⁰ See, E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture*, (New York: The New Press, 1993), pp. 85-258; James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

⁸¹ Prada, “Buen Vivir as a model for state and economy,” p. 147.

⁸² Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” p. 188.

peasant right) to guarantee – or at least not infringe upon – the subsistence claims and arrangements of the peasantry.”⁸³ However, whereas the moral economy has been discussed almost exclusively as a *pre*-capitalist bulwark against the increasing marketization of social relations with the rise of capitalism, *vivir bien*, while serving as a defense against the expansion of capitalist relations into previously non-capitalist spaces, is also a positive proposition for a *post*-capitalist future. As Pablo Davalos notes, “in the same way that a plurinational State is an alternative to the liberal contractualism of the modern State... *sumak kawsay* [*vivir bien*] is the alternative to the capitalist mode of production, distribution and consumption.”⁸⁴

Raúl Prada lays out four core conceptual and programmatic principles of *vivir bien*. The first is that the idea of development is not seen as a singular, one-size-fits-all scheme. Rather, it is plural and seeks to incorporate the social, political, and cultural aspects of the developmental process, in addition to the economic. Second, development is not merely a quantitative analysis of economic indicators, but a qualitative process that must consider the community’s enjoyment of material goods and subjective, spiritual, and intellectual improvement. Third, the accumulation of wealth and industrialization are not the aims of a desirable future, but are the means for attaining the harmonious coexistence between communities and with nature. Finally, the current focus on the individual needs to give way to relational coexistence and intercultural dialogue; well-being does not depend on the exploitation or cultural

⁸³ Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, p. 188.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Salvador Schavelzon, *Plurinacionalidad y Vivir Bien/Buen Vivir: Dos conceptos leídos desde Bolivia y Ecuador post-constituyentes*, (Quito: Abya Yala, 2015), p. 185.

exclusion of others.⁸⁵ Taken together, these four principles demonstrate that *vivir bien* is a different way of understanding the world. It does not deny the need to generate wealth, but the objectives to which that collective wealth is put are radically different. *Vivir bien* “aims not only at meeting the material needs of the production of use-value, but other values of emancipation. Above all, it is freedom – not reduced to a Western negative freedom – that links human beings to politics and the ability to have a direct influence on decisions that affect their lives, their natural and community context. This is cultural plurality in the broadest sense.”⁸⁶

Vivir bien is a utopic vision and the transition beyond extractivism and capitalism will undoubtedly be a complex and difficult process. “It is difficult to re-imagine the moral assumptions of another social configuration,” Thompson tells us. “It is not easy for us to conceive that there may have been a time, within a smaller and more integrated community, when it appeared to be ‘unnatural’ that any man should profit from the necessities of others, and when it was assumed that, in time of dearth, prices of ‘necessities’ should remain at a customary level, even though there might be less all around.”⁸⁷ Nevertheless, as advocates of *vivir bien* argue, it will never become a real possibility if extractive capitalism continues to expand. The construction of a new socio-economic configuration would necessarily start by halting the expansion and intensification of the extractivist model based on the export of primary commodities. Attempting to “develop” through the extractivist mode of

⁸⁵ Prada, “Buen Vivir as a model for state and economy,” pp. 148-149.

⁸⁶ Prada, “Buen Vivir as a model for state and economy,” p. 149.

⁸⁷ Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” pp. 252-253.

accumulation, “which overvalues profits from Nature and undervalues human effort, systematically destroys the environment and has serious negative effects on social and community structures, gives priority to the export market and neglects the domestic market, fosters wealth concentration and sidelines equality,” has historically been unable to create successful development in Bolivia, not to mention the rest of Latin America.⁸⁸ Thus, the conflict over the proposed highway through the TIPNIS is one battle in a much larger struggle over the future of Bolivian development.

Whereas the proposed TIPNIS highway represents the continuation of the extractivist model of dependent development that began with the Conquest, opponents of the road envision an alternative to development, a model of postdevelopment and degrowth.⁸⁹

From this second option, development as *vivir bien*, economic growth is not disregarded but, rather, is situated within a context where other interests, such as the rights of nature and the cultural rights of indigenous peoples, are also taken into account.

Who Decides? Prior Consultation and Consent

The final issue to highlight in this chapter is that of free, prior, and informed consultation and/or consent. Prior *consultation* is the collective right of indigenous communities to be previously consulted in the event that their territory would be

⁸⁸ Acosta, “Extractivism and neoextractivism,” p. 80.

⁸⁹ Arturo Escobar, “Degrowth, postdevelopment, and transitions: a preliminary conversation,” *Sustainability Science*, 10 (2015), pp. 451-462. For a critique, see Claudio Katz, “Considerations on postdevelopmentalism in Latin America,” *International Socialist Review*, 97 (2015), at <http://isreview.org/issue/97/considerations-postdevelopmentalism-latin-america>.

affected by natural resource extraction or development projects. Prior *consent* takes this consultation process one step further and requires that those communities give their permission before any project affecting their territory goes ahead. Processes of prior consultation are seen as powerful tools to counteract the negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts that characterize the extraction of natural resources across the globe. They are intended to increase effective participation, help protect the rights of indigenous peoples, and democratize resource governance by giving local communities a say over decisions that affect them.⁹⁰ In Bolivia, indigenous peoples' demands for prior consultation have often been articulated in opposition to the state's traditional role as the dominant, sovereign entity with complete control over the nation's land and resources.⁹¹

Rooted in international human rights law, prior consultation is a right that is rooted in the International Labor Organization's 1989 Convention 169, and has also been included in the United Nations' 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).⁹² In response to the lowland indigenous March for Territory and

⁹⁰ Lorenza B. Fontana and Jean Grugel, "The Politics of Indigenous Participation Through 'Free Prior Informed Consent': Reflections from the Bolivian Case," *World Development*, 77 (2016), p. 250; Almut Schilling-Vacaflor, "Rethinking the link between consultation and conflict: lessons from Bolivia's gas sector," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 35:4 (2014), p. 503.

⁹¹ Almut Schilling-Vacaflor, "Who controls the territory and the resources? Free prior and informed consent (FPIC) as a contested human rights practice in Bolivia," *Third World Quarterly*, 38:5 (2017), p. 1061.

⁹² Article 15.2 of the ILO Convention 169 states "governments shall establish or maintain procedures through which they shall consult these peoples, with a view to ascertaining whether and to what degree their interests would be prejudiced, before undertaking or permitting any programs for the exploration or exploitation of such resources pertaining to their lands." The UNDRIP, in contrast, takes a stronger approach to indigenous peoples' rights in relation to extractive projects and explicitly argues for free, prior, and informed *consent*. Article 32.2 maintains: "States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories

Dignity, organized by the lowland regional indigenous organization CIDOB (*Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano*), President Jaime Paz Zamora ratified the ILO Convention 169 in 1991 through Law 1257. Growing out of the *Guerras del Gas* in the early 2000s, the 2005 Hydrocarbons Law 3058 included a section on the requirements of prior consultation, which stated that “native, indigenous and peasant communities and peoples... should be consulted in a prior, mandatory and timely manner when it is intended to develop any hydrocarbon activity.”⁹³ In 2007, Supreme Decree 29033 was promulgated by Evo Morales which further required the carrying out of participatory consultation in relation to development projects in indigenous territories. After the contentious 2006-2008 Constituent Assembly, the right to prior and informed consultation regarding the exploitation of natural resources in indigenous territories was written into the country’s 2009 Constitution.⁹⁴ Humphreys Bebbington argues that these various legislative victories “represented the culmination of years of mobilization, lobbying and negotiation with executive and legislative officials, bringing indigenous lowland groups closer to their goal of effective control over their territories. These mechanisms were also of enormous symbolic importance to the Morales government which heralded them as being of universal importance to indigenous societies faced

and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.”

⁹³ Quoted in Fontana and Grugel, “The Politics of Indigenous Participation Through ‘Free Prior Informed Consent,’” p. 253.

⁹⁴ *Constitución Política del Estado*, 2009, Articles 30, 290, 304, 352, and 403.

with extractive activity in their territory.”⁹⁵ However, despite the ratification of prior consultation in the Constitution, the document does not recognize the more radical right to prior consent, even though this stronger proclamation was demanded by indigenous groups during the Constituent Assembly and is recognized by the UNDRIP, all 46 articles of which are officially recognized as national law in Bolivia under Law 3760.⁹⁶

It is clear that a complex and somewhat contradictory legal foundation surrounds the right of prior consultation and/or consent. Furthermore, despite the potential democratizing and participatory effects that processes of prior consultation provide, scholars have been less than optimistic about its actual impact in Bolivia.⁹⁷ According to Falleti and Riofranco, “its [prior consultation] implementation has been crippled in the context of an increasing reliance on the revenues generated by the extractive sectors.”⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the enactment of prior consultation (or lack thereof) in the TIPNIS in relation to the planned highway has been a central point of contention between indigenous groups in the Park and their supporters, on the one hand, and the MAS government and road proponents, on the other.

⁹⁵ Denise Humphreys Bebbington, “Consultation, Compensation and Conflict: Natural Gas Extraction in Weenhayek Territory, Bolivia,” *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 11:2 (2012), p. 59. For an overview of the 2006-2008 Constituent Assembly, see Salvador Schavelzon, *El nacimiento del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia: Etnografía de una Asamblea Constituyente*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2012).

⁹⁶ Jason Tockman, John Cameron, and Wilfredo Plata, “New Institutions of Indigenous Self-Governance in Bolivia: Between Autonomy and Self-Discipline,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 10:1 (2015), pp. 48-49.

⁹⁷ Lorenzo Pellegrini and Marco Ribera Arismendi, “Consultation, Compensation and Extraction in Bolivia after the ‘Left Turn’: The Case of Oil Exploration in the North of La Paz Department,” *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 11:2 (2012), pp. 103-120; Humphreys Bebbington, “Consultation, Compensation and Conflict”; Schilling-Vacaflor, “Rethinking the link between consultation and conflict”.

⁹⁸ Tulia G. Falleti and Thea Riofrancos, “Participatory Democracy in Latin America: The Collective Right to Prior Consultation in Ecuador and Bolivia,” *Comparative Politics Colloquium*, (2014), p. 32.

A central claim made by indigenous protestors against the proposed highway was that the government initially failed to carry out a free, prior, and informed consultation exercise. In response to the demands of “counter march” in favor of the highway in late 2011 by the *Consejo Indígena del Sur* (Indigenous Council of the South, CONISUR), the MAS passed legislation in early 2012 to carry out a consultation in order to decide the fate of the highway construction. The consultation covered three main themes: 1) whether the TIPNIS should remain “intangible,” as stated in Law 180 that originally shut down construction; 2) whether the proposed highway through the Park should be constructed; and 3) what measures should be taken to prevent illegal settlements in the TIPNIS. The consultation process was finalized in December 2012 with the government stating that 55 of the 69 communities consulted coming down in favor of the proposed highway. The MAS claimed the results represented a triumph of democracy and a successful outcome of Bolivia’s first experience with the *consulta previa* for indigenous communities mandated by the Constitution and international law.⁹⁹ Importantly, the consultation included not just the indigenous groups with protected status in the Park, but also the cocalero communities that had been strong proponents of the road and who reside in Poligono 7.¹⁰⁰

Opposition indigenous leaders claimed that the *consulta* was a forgone conclusion, highlighting that the consultation would take place after construction on

⁹⁹ McNeish, “Extraction, Protest and Indigeneity in Bolivia,” p. 231.

¹⁰⁰ Muñoz, “El conflicto en torno al Territorio Indígena Parque nacional Isiboro Sécore,” pp. 116-117.

the highway had already begun.¹⁰¹ Before the process had been finished, in October 2012 Morales stated “with 47 communities consulted, which is more than two thirds, and with the approval of the highway construction, it is no longer important to consult the other communities.”¹⁰² This statement demonstrates a hegemonic vision of the process where what matters is the assemblage of a “universal” majority, rather than the actual discussion and incorporation of the particular interests of all interested communities into the process. Morales further disparaged the consultation process, while also underlining the developmentalist goals of the project, when he stated, “They [opposition indigenous groups] want the consultation to be binding. That is impossible, it is not negotiable. The constitution and international law mandate previous consultation, and we will always respect that, but letting a group of families tell us what to do would mean paralyzing all our work on electrification, hydrocarbons, and industry.” He went on the state, “Whether they want it or not, we will build the highway.”¹⁰³

Questioning the merits of the *consulta*, indigenous leaders claimed that only a minority of residents were actually consulted and the process did not include the participation of recognized indigenous organizations and authorities. Fernando Vargas, the head of the TIPNIS Subcentral, claimed that, contrary to government assertions, at least 30 communities actually rejected the *consulta*. Additionally,

¹⁰¹ Farthing and Kohl, *Evo's Bolivia*, p. 53.

¹⁰² Quoted in *La Razon*, “Evo Morales dice que ya hay la autorización indígena para construir la carretera por el TIPNIS,” October 8, 2012.

¹⁰³ Evo Morales quoted in Canessa, “Conflict, claim and contradiction in the new ‘indigenous’ state of Bolivia,” p. 164.

critics argued that the government was using clientelist practices to influence the process by promising goods, such as outboard motors, and the delivery of services, such as education, health and transportation, which would breach the legal definition of free, prior, and informed consultation.¹⁰⁴

The December 2012 findings of a 15-member inter-institutional commission representing the Catholic Church and the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights in Bolivia (APDHB), in association with the Inter-American Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), support critics' allegations of irregularities in the consultation process and government manipulation. Of the 36 communities the commission visited, 30 rejected the proposed highway, 3 accepted it, while 3 others conditioned their acceptance on further study and/or changes in the proposed route. The commission also concluded that the *consulta* did not conform to standards of prior consultation established by national and international law as it failed to respect collective indigenous-making norms and did not provide information on the road's potential environmental, social, economic, and cultural impacts. Additionally, according to the commission, the government's promises of goods and services in conjunction with the consultation process severely compromised the integrity of the *consulta*.¹⁰⁵

TIPNIS and the Contrasting Visions of Hegemony and Plurinationality

¹⁰⁴ Farthing and Kohl, *Evo's Bolivia*, p. 53; Emily Achtenberg, "Bolivia: End of the Road for the TIPNIS Consulta," *NACLA*, December 2012, at <https://nacla.org/blog/2012/12/13/bolivia-end-road-tipnis-consulta>.

¹⁰⁵ Emily Achtenberg, "Battle of Reports Sustains Bolivia's TIPNIS Conflict," *NACLA*, January 2013, at <https://nacla.org/print/8726>; Informe Iglesia Catolica-PDHB, at http://www.la-razon.com/nacional/Informe-Iglesia-Catolica-APDHB-TIPNIS_LRZFIL20121217_0003.pdf.

Fontana and Grugel argue that conflicts around prior consultation, such as that occurring within the TIPNIS, “are generated by a combination of context, namely sudden and unprecedented economic bonanza at a time of rising claims based on indigeneity, alongside the fact that FPIC [free prior informed consent] acts as a lightning rod for longstanding tensions between different social and political groups over territory and for access to political and economic resources. FPIC has not ‘invented’ these conflicts; but it has certainly magnified them.” I would add that the TIPNIS conflict over prior consultation also brings into stark relief the two contrasting visions of national economic development put forth by the hegemonic project of the MAS and the proponents of plurinationality: developmental state capitalism and an alternative model based on the idea of *vivir bien*, respectively. Raúl Prada is correct in his assertion that, within the contemporary Bolivian process of political and economic transformation, the TIPNIS conflict demonstrates “there are two projects that cannot be combined and are in fact in confrontation. One is the continuation of the extractivist, capitalist, developmentalist model. It is the continuation of the republic’s historic model of development until the present. The extractivist model is colonial due to the colonial character of the geopolitics of the capitalist world system which reduces Bolivia to exporting primary natural resources. The other model is indigenous, the model of *vivir bien*.”¹⁰⁶ Elsewhere Prada argues that the project of the MAS government “is to conserve, continue, extend and deepen

¹⁰⁶ Raúl Prada Alcoreza, “Estado plurinacional comunitario autonómico y pluralismo jurídico,” in Boaventura de Sousa Santos and José Luis Exeni Rodríguez (eds.), *Justicia Indígena, Plurinacionalidad e Interculturalidad en Bolivia*, (La Paz: Fundación Rosa Luxemburg, 2012), p. 416.

the colonial extractive model of dependent capitalism and to reestablish and consolidate the nation-state, annulling the possibilities for constructing a plurinational state.” From this extractivist perspective, “the government cannot accept the [right to] consultation with free, informed and prior consent, nor can it guarantee the rights of indigenous nations and peoples or even less respect their territories, autonomy, self-governance and self-determination, as established in the constitution.”¹⁰⁷ To recognize the right to prior consent would jeopardize the extractive capitalist mode of accumulation and its attendant political form of the nation-state that undergirds the MAS’s hegemonic domination.

The MAS project that Prada draws our attention to is fundamentally about the construction of a new Bolivian hegemony. However, to say this is not to argue that the hegemonic project is simply the maintenance of the status quo ante or that it is not in any sense progressive. Evo and the MAS have forcefully reinserted the state into the economy, which has provided the government with a boon of new resources. They called a Constituent Assembly and rewrote the country’s Magna Carta, have led a significant agrarian reform, reduced poverty, reformed education and increased school attendance across the board, and implemented a number of social programs that have benefitted Bolivia’s most vulnerable citizens, to name a few MAS accomplishments. But, social transformation of the kind called for during the 2000-2005 insurrectionary period that brought the MAS to power is more than a checklist of socio-economic achievements. Social transformation also includes the

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Jason Tockman and John Cameron, “Indigenous Autonomy and the Contradictions of Plurinationalism in Bolivia,” *Latin American Politics and Society*, 56:3 (2014), p. 61.

development of different material and ideological ways of being in the world, different understandings of the relations between people and their surroundings, and different systems of reproducing society. Additionally, *how* those transformations are managed, and *by whom*, is just as important as the transformations themselves.

The manner in which the MAS has sought to construct a highway through a national park and indigenous territory has played just as important of a role in the conflict over the road as its projected effects. The top-down process of decision-making around the highway, the derision and violent repression of the marchers in Chaparina, and the failure to abide by the right of indigenous peoples to free, prior, and informed consultation/consent according to international legal norms and outlined in the Constitution all point to a hegemonic understanding of the operation of social power. The MAS's vision of revolutionary change includes a political strategy to restructure the relations of social and economic power through the organization and direction of the various social forces that constitute its base. Similarly, these events demonstrate a particular vision of what development means and how it should be implemented. For the MAS government, development means industrialization and the strategy to achieve that objective is increased exploitation of natural resources, i.e. extractivism. The ultimate goal, more or less, is to provide more resources and better living conditions for the Bolivian people as a whole. Therefore, allowing a small minority group to stand in the way of national development objectives will only serve to keep Bolivia in its dependent position within the global capitalist system.

This is precisely where the hegemonic and plurinational forms of politics differ. The operation of hegemony does not simply imply the complete control of society by the dominant group. The hegemonic bloc needs to recognize and continually adjust to the interests and demands of opposition groups, always seeking to incorporate them in some fashion and gain their consent, albeit always in a subordinate position. This is important to the extent that it theoretically leaves open the possibilities for resistance and change. However, when certain groups or ideas are unable to be absorbed into the hegemonic bloc and their active consent is no longer seen as a possibility, the only other option available is that of coercion; imposing passive consent through the use of force. This is exactly what Gramsci means when he talks about the state as “hegemony protected by the armour of coercion.”¹⁰⁸ In the case of the TIPNIS, the MAS attempt to impose its will through force was a spectacular failure. Not only did the raid at Chaparina fail to quell the protesters and end the march, it had a galvanizing effect on the larger civil society inciting them to throw their support behind the protestors and against the MAS.

From the perspective of plurinationality, like hegemony, politics is about the creation of a consensus on public matters. However, the manner in which the positions and interests of the various groups involved in any political process are expressed and taken into account and the way in which a consensus is formed seem to differ. An important mechanism for the creation of a common consensus is the process of prior consultation. But, whereas the MAS seems to see prior consultation

¹⁰⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 263.

as a hindrance to development and an obstacle to be overcome through the will of a simple majority, for proponents of plurinationality it represents a tool for those negatively affected to voice their concerns, propose changes, and to ultimately transform the practice of decision-making. For instance, Morales has generally derided the drawn-out process of prior consultation as getting in the way of the government's developmental initiatives. In 2015 he argued, "it is not possible that we lose so much time with the so-called consultations; this is a great weakness of our state, of our people. We are modifying some norms with the single objective of accelerating investment and obtaining more natural resources to benefit the Bolivian people."¹⁰⁹ Yet, if plurinationality is the recognition of the histories, cultures, and, perhaps most importantly, the rights of the multiple nationalities that coexist within Bolivia's geographic borders, then not only is it constitutionally required to have their demands and concerns taken into account but this also a revolutionary democratizing way of forming a consensus around public matters. Undoubtedly this process will take time, but if plurinationality "consists in providing the mechanisms and formats to *guarantee shared responsibility* for the totality of collective affairs," then "as a consequence, it is founded on – and necessarily requires – the availability of sufficient time to set in motion the ample and complex processes of deliberation in which, little by little, agreements are achieved which express shared decisions

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Almut Schilling-Vacaflor, "Who controls the territory and the resources? Free prior and informed consent (FPIC) as a contested human rights practice in Bolivia," *Third World Quarterly*, 38:5 (2017), p. 1065.

concerning what is to be done.”¹¹⁰ In essence, these processes of deliberation and the formation of a common consensus are the practices of autonomous self-government that are the cornerstone of any authentic plurinational project.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an epigraph from Eugen Weber highlighting the role of roads in the process of national integration and capitalist market expansion that accompanied the French Revolution. “Roads that permitted carts,” Weber claims, “would be an emancipation as important as political revolution, probably more important.”¹¹¹ Roads, it is argued, facilitated the transformation of France’s rural economic and social structures by providing the peasantry access to the market and “modern civilization.” Weber adds, roads helped to bring about “not only civilization, but national unity too. There could be no national unity before there was national circulation.”¹¹² Yet, with the expansion of “civilization” and “national unity” came the demise of local autonomy, economies, customs, and cultures. Roads “brought ruin to local enterprises no longer protected by earlier isolation, to outdated occupational groups like the riverboatmen, and to producers of mediocre local goods or crops fated to be outmatched by specialized ones.”¹¹³ Thus, it is clear that roads

¹¹⁰ Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, “Competing political visions and Bolivia’s unfinished revolution,” *Dialectical Anthropology*, 35 (2011), p. 276.

¹¹¹ Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, p. 208.

¹¹² Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, p. 218.

¹¹³ Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, p. 217.

played an critical role in turning “peasants into Frenchmen,” as Weber would have it, but was that transformation truly an emancipatory one?

Underlying Weber’s argument is a particular vision of emancipation bound up with the development and growth of the nation-state, capitalism, and representative democracy as new forms of socio-economic and political interaction, the fundamental organizing structures of modern citizenship. This vision, of course, still remains relevant. However, there also exist other ideas of emancipation that go beyond the representative democratic nation-state and capitalism and open up the possibility for thinking about the structures and the relations of the state, society, and economy in different ways. According to Raquel Gutiérrez,

the politics of emancipation or, more accurately, emancipatory political action is no longer primarily, or solely, a discussion or competition regarding different ways of regulating and managing society conceived as a totality. Rather, it is a matter of the creation, care, expansion, and consolidation of a common ability to intervene – through deliberation and execution – in the issues that are incumbent on us all. Emancipation, then, is an issue both of understanding and reinforcing the sources of these abilities and of reflecting and acting on them, while simultaneously consolidating and extending them.¹¹⁴

Emancipation, then, can also be understood as the capacity for people to take action and to decide public matters for and by themselves, and, importantly, to do so through the mediums their own traditions and customs of decision-making.

I have tried to demonstrate through an examination of the TIPNIS conflict how the theories and practices of hegemony and plurinationality, respectively,

¹¹⁴ Raquel Gutiérrez, “The Rhythms of the *Pachakuti*: Brief Reflections Regarding How We Have Come to Know Emancipatory Struggles and the Significance of the Term *Social Emancipation*,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 111:1 (2012), p. 57.

advance contrasting visions of development. Essential to any integral notion of development (i.e. beyond a narrow focus on economic growth) is the idea of emancipation.¹¹⁵ Thus, the conflict over TIPNIS highway underscores the differing views of development within Bolivia regarding economic growth and the relationship between society and nature, but also how decisions surrounding development policy are made, who benefits, and what that means in terms of the distribution of power and social emancipation.

Morales and the MAS have supported the road for the specific reasons of national unification and to spur development for Amazonian Indians in order to emancipate them from the yoke of patrimonial feudalism despite the fact that this could lead to the expansion of the extractive frontier through the continued appropriation of indigenous territory. Yet, this type of argument assumes that the model of state-led extractive capitalism is inherently progressive and emancipatory. A similar idea is articulated in the second epigraph that opened this chapter. The stanza from Goethe is taken from an 1853 article of Marx where he critiques the horrors of British colonialism in India while nevertheless extolling the advantages of the project in terms of forcing India into capitalist modernity. “English steam and English free trade,” Marx argues, has broken down the traditional Indian social structures “by blowing up their economical basis, and thus produced the greatest, and to speak the truth, the only social revolution ever heard of in Asia.”¹¹⁶ In essence, Marx is arguing that despite all the suffering inflicted upon India by the British, in the

¹¹⁵ See, for instance, Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).

¹¹⁶ Marx, “The British Rule in India”.

end colonialism helped to bring about capitalist progress that would, eventually, lead to human emancipation. Thus, his use of the lines from Goethe, “Should this torture then torment us, Since it brings us greater pleasure?”¹¹⁷

This progressive vision of capitalist expansion can also be seen in the opening pages of *The Communist Manifesto*:

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians’ intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.¹¹⁸

Here Marx and Engels imply that the colonial expansion of bourgeois capitalism, despite its forceful coercion by “pain of extinction,” is ultimately a liberating and progressive force from the feudal age as it “draws all, even the most barbarian nations into civilization.” It also assumes an ethnocentric, linear, and teleological vision of social and economic development based on the experience of the industrially advanced European nations of the time.

¹¹⁷ For an excellent discussion of Marx’s views on British colonialism in India and his changing analysis of the “progressive” impacts of capitalism and colonialism, see Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 11-24. Later on in life, Marx changed his interpretation on the historical trajectory of development and gave more attention to the specifics of “traditional,” non-Western societies. See, Karl Marx, *The Ethnological Notebooks*, (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum & Comp., 1972); and, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, (New York: International Publishers, 1965), particularly the 1881 correspondence between Marx and Vera Zasulich, pp. 142-145.

¹¹⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 84.

The MAS has put forward a similar vision of development and the progressive and emancipatory aspects that a so-called “Andean-Amazonian capitalism” would bring with a highway through the TIPNIS.¹¹⁹ Evo Morales, for instance, recently claimed that those who continue to oppose the highway “are enemies of the Beni. They do not want integration nor development, but instead want the people of the Beni to live like they did 200 years ago.”¹²⁰ Similarly, vice president García Linera argues that the Amazonian TIPNIS region is stuck in a developmental stage of feudal-like social relations and patrimonial domination. He describes the social relations of power in the following terms:

until recently, the *patron* or *hacendado* was the owner of everything in his sight, and through the use of violence occupied lands and imposed his law over the surrounding peons, indigenous people, and poor *campesinos*. To the extent that power was structured around the ownership of land and its violent occupation, a conservative landowner logic – the most conservative in the entire country – prevailed in the Amazon region. Accordingly, the *hacendados*, loggers, landlords and their intermediaries had established, since the beginning of the republican State, a kind of pact with the government to exercise, through their local and family networks, a limited state presence in the area; land, state resources, and impunity had become hereditary aspects of state power in the Amazon. In this way, the State appeared as simply an extension of a small *hacendado*, rubber, rancher, and lumber elite, at the same time legitimizing and imposing itself through violence over the population. Even today, this patrimonial *hacendado* power in the Amazon is the most conservative and reactionary form of regional domination that exists in the country. In a certain way, the figure of the landowner personifies the most despotic powers in existence: not only is he the owner of the land, he is also the employer of workers, the buyer of wood, the provider of market goods to remote populations, the influential politician whose relatives monopolize

¹¹⁹ On the notion of Andean-Amazonian capitalism, see Alvaro García Linera, “El ‘capitalismo andino-amazónico,’” *Le Monde diplomatique*, 2006, at <https://www.lemondediplomatique.cl/El-capitalismo-andino-amazonico.html>. For a critique, see Tom Lewis, “The politics of ‘Andean-Amazonian capitalism,’” *International Socialist Review*, 83 (2012), at <http://isreview.org/issue/83/politics-andean-amazonian-capitalism>.

¹²⁰ Quoted in *La Razon*, “Mesa considera que la nueva ley del TIPNIS hipoteca el futuro del agua y el oxígeno en Bolivia,” August 14, 2017.

public office, and, therefore, is the provider of public land and favors to a population deprived of everything: lands, property, public authority, and the State. As such, it is not strange that the landowner is also the center of popular local rituals like parties, weddings, or the one who determines which kids will be educated. The entire structure of colonial patrimonial power converges in the figure of the *hacendado* and his overarching and paternal command. And while the dispersed indigenous organizations have maintained their local autonomy at the level of the small town, assemblies, and unions, they have not managed to become a leading force at the local or regional level, much less are they able to challenge the authority and domination of the patrimonial *hacendado* structure of power.... The despotic order of the *hacendado* landowner predominates and neither the indigenous organizations, nor the more recent peasant or worker organizations, have managed to create a organizational or discursive counter-power that can break down this patrimonial *hacendado* system.”¹²¹

This being the state of affairs in the TIPNIS, the MAS has argued that it is incumbent upon the state to reorganize this backward social structure despite the fact that this process of reorganization may also bring about the dispossession of indigenous territory through increased levels of cocalero colonization and the expansion of an extractive capitalist mode of accumulation. However, it is argued that this capitalist transformation is only a temporary phase on the way to a future communitarian socialist society. According to García Linera, Andean-Amazonian capitalism is the best strategic way to “improve the possibilities for the forces of worker and communitarian emancipation in the medium term,” and for this reason “it is conceived as a temporary and transitional mechanism.”¹²² Should this torture then torment us, since it brings us greater pleasure?

Regardless of these emancipatory intentions, the decision-making process around the road was seen by many as an hegemonic imposition by the state of a

¹²¹ García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, pp. 24-25, 25-26.

¹²² García Linera, “El ‘capitalismo andino-amazónico’”.

particular vision and strategy for development that was in conflict with local desires. In other words, the TIPNIS highway was part of a state-led, top-down project of national unification and economic development with one goal being the emancipation of the Park's indigenous peoples from above. Again, despite the emancipatory intentions of the MAS, the actual outcome is questionable to the extent that "it is one thing when men [sic] themselves, through their own collective impulse, break the yoke of feudalism and quite another when they are freed through a vertical act, that is to say, by something that does not come from their own doing. Exogenous freedom produces only formal freedom."¹²³ In other words, the highway may indeed play a role in breaking down the current local power structure, but the indigenous protestors argue that it will simply be replaced by another mode of social relations, that is to say, a new hegemonic order, with similar objectives of extraction and appropriation.

Bolivia, like all other societies, faces questions surrounding its model of development. It is in search of a path that both preserves the natural environment while also working to satisfy the basic needs of its people. However, has made Bolivia a particularly interesting case is the fact that the idea of development itself came under question at the same time that important social changes were taking place at the turn of the 21st century that sought to fundamentally transform the country. Following Blaser, this moment was a double crisis of hegemony: 1) a crisis of the neoliberal model of development that held sway since the 1980s, and 2) a crisis of the

¹²³ René Zavaleta Mercado, "El Estado en América Latina," in *Obra Completa, Tomo II: Ensayos 1975-1984*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2013), p. 623.

project of modernization, that is, the project of modernity that began 500 years ago.¹²⁴ For Escobar, this period of hegemonic crises represented a crossroads for Bolivia between two alternatives developmental visions of the future. The first possibility was a *transformation* away from neoliberalism but one that would nevertheless stay within the cultural and developmental confines of modernity. The second option represented a *transition* toward a different way of being, toward a new ontological cosmovision and a new idea of development beyond the parameters of modernity.¹²⁵ As I have attempted to demonstrate here, the MAS project for the highway through the TIPNIS is within the realm of the former, while the opponents of the proposed road offer a vision of development more closely aligned with the latter. Thus, the conflict over the highway through the TIPNIS represents a central point of contention between the two differing visions of what Bolivia's model of development should look like and how it ought to be carried out.

¹²⁴ Mario Blaser, "Bolivia: los desafíos interpretativos de la coincidencia de una doble crisis hegemónica," in Karin Monasterios, Pablo Stefanoni, and Hervé Do Alto (eds.), *Reinventando la nación en Bolivia: Movimientos sociales, Estado y poscolonialidad*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2007), pp. 11-21.

¹²⁵ Arturo Escobar, "Post-extractivismo y pluriverso," *América Latina en Movimiento*, 473 (2012), at <https://www.alainet.org/es/active/53567>.

Plurality and Populism: CONAMAQ and Struggles of Indigenous Representation

They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.

Karl Marx, 1852

As Indians they oppressed us and as Indians we will liberate ourselves.

Fausto Reinaga, 1969

On my first trip to Bolivia, a brief two-month preliminary research stint in the summer of 2013, a colleague from Colombia, Katherine, and I were at the headquarters of the *Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu* (National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu, CONAMAQ), one of Bolivia's most important highland indigenous movement organizations. We were there to assist in the review and revision of the organization's proposed draft on the law on prior and informed consultation, which was then under consideration. The process of drafting the legislation of prior and informed consultation had become increasingly antagonistic as tensions between the central indigenous movements of the *Pacto de Unidad* (Unity Pact)¹ and the MAS had grown due to the conflict over the TIPNIS highway discussed in the previous chapter. Despite the tense situation, the activists at

¹ Formed in the midst of Bolivia's 2000-2005 revolutionary upheaval, the Unity Pact was composed of the most important and powerful social movement organizations in the country. This organization provided the main base of support that brought Evo Morales and the MAS to power in 2005. They included the CSUTCB (*Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*), CONAMAQ, CIDOB (*Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente de Bolivia*), the Bartolinas (*Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia – Bartolina Sisa*), and CSCIB (*Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales de Bolivia*).

CONAMAQ were open to a couple of graduate student researchers coming to see just what it was they were up to.

By the time I returned in January 2015 for a year of fieldwork, CONAMAQ had undergone significant changes. I returned to their office headquarters in the Sopocachi neighborhood of La Paz only to find a new and much more suspicious and confrontational group of interlocutors. Out front were parked three brand new pick-up trucks, while inside a row of brand new computers lined the wall. In the entryway three people from the department of Oruro sat quietly waiting to meet with someone. After the *Oruroeños* had been attended to and ushered upstairs, I introduced myself to a young man who took a seat behind the desk in the entryway. I was not sure if my previous acquaintances would still be in the capital away from their communities after more than a year since my last visit, so I asked if Roberto or Erwin² were around and, if not, if there was anyone I could speak with. I was eventually led upstairs to the office of Hilarión Mamani, the new *apu mallku*, or head leader, of the organization. After introducing myself to Mamani and dropping a few names of previous contacts within the organization to signify my affinity with CONAMAQ, I was told in no uncertain terms that those people were no longer around and that things had changed. Before I had a chance to ask what exactly had happened, Mamani told me he was too busy to talk and escorted me out of the office, telling me to come back in a month or so after *Carnaval* if I was still interested in talking.

² These are not their actual names. Most names in this chapter have been changed to protect the identity of my contacts. I only use the actual names of well-known public figures in leadership positions.

I had been denied requests for interviews and access many times before and I was under no illusions that an academic researcher could or should have the privilege to talk with anyone at anytime. However, this instance felt different. In my previous visits to CONAMAQ I was welcome to simply sit around and hang out if no one had the time or was interested in talking. This time I had not seen any familiar faces in the office and the entire atmosphere seemed much more regulated and restrictive. What had happened? What had changed?

In December 2013, CONAMAQ faced a serious crisis as it split into two rival factions with competing parallel leaderships. Although an early and forceful ally of the government, Evo Morales and his MAS party had encouraged the dispute between the pro-MAS and opposition factions, openly supporting the pro-MAS wing. While both factions continue to claim legitimate authority and popular support, the pro-MAS group is in control of organization headquarters, is recognized as the legal representative of the organization by the government, and receives material support from the MAS. Analyzing the conflict as a moment in the fundamental struggle between hegemony and plurinationality, I argue that the MAS has tried to construct a hegemonic form of indigeneity, which contrasts with the country's plurality of indigenous identities, as part of its particular vision of social change and political transformation. I argue that the MAS government's intervention in CONAMAQ is a logical outcome of a populist strategy for gaining hegemony. While a populist strategy opened political space and gave a voice to many of Bolivia's dispossessed citizens during the wave of insurrection that brought Morales and the MAS to power,

this chapter examines what happens after that populist coalition gains hegemony. More than just a struggle over representative control of the indigenous movement, this case reveals a more fundamental conflict between the MAS and its erstwhile supporters over the relationship between the state and civil society, the meaning of indigeneity, and the practice of politics and its transformation.

In the next section I present an overview of CONAMAQ in order to explain the organizational history and central goals of the movement, ending with a brief summary of the 2013 government intervention that split the organization in two.³ I then move on to analyze the concept of populism in general terms, before laying out how I theorize populism as a specific type of political logic and practice as a useful way to understand not only how and why the MAS intervened in CONAMAQ, but to also highlight some other important factors at play such as indigenous identity and political representation. I end the chapter with a discussion of how the theory of plurinationality might provide an alternative political logic and practice of state-society relations.

CONAMAQ and the Reconstitution of the Ayllu

³ Activists and analysts in Bolivia have labeled the MAS-supported wing that took over CONAMAQ's organizational headquarters "CONAMAS," while referring to the faction headed by the popularly elected leadership in 2012 as "CONAMAQ *orgánico*." The CONAMAS label is often used in a derogatory fashion to highlight that faction's lack of independence and autonomy from the government, while the term *orgánico* is meant to signify a more authentic and organic link between leadership and base within the opposition faction. It is worth noting that "CONAMAS" members simply refer to themselves as "CONAMAQ" and describe the opposition faction as ex-members of the organization. These labels are obviously imbued with symbolic meanings meant to scorn one camp while exalting the other. While I do not necessarily agree with all the symbolic implications behind these labels, I use them nonetheless throughout this chapter as a commonly understood shorthand for distinguishing between the parallel organizational camps.

Although officially founded in a backyard meeting in the small highland town of Challapata, Oruro in 1997, rank and file members and leaders of CONAMAQ alike reiterated to me over and over that they have “been around for centuries.” Employing what Spivak labeled strategic essentialism, by highlighting its pre-Columbian organizational roots CONAMAQ has sought to positively essentialize their indigeneity in order to advance a political project.⁴ That political project is the reinterpretation of their indigenous identity and the reconstitution of *ayllus* and *markas*, which would provide the territorial space to cultivate indigenous modes of being, which would, in turn, lead to the decolonization Bolivian society.⁵ *Ayllus* are the basic units of indigenous communities that have existed throughout the Andes since well before the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, while *markas* are a larger communal unit composed of multiple *ayllus*. Conceptualized by Murra as “vertical archipelagos,” *ayllus* stretch over various ecological zones in order to avert the risks of high altitude agriculture production in the environs of the Andean mountains.⁶

⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, (New York: Methuen Inc, 1987) p. 205. Bolivian scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui problematizes the notion of strategic essentialism through what she labels “strategic ethnicity.” For Rivera Cusicanqui, the employment of an essential ethnic identity runs up against its limits when it is coopted and used toward the extension of state power. See Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, XXXXX

⁵ The term “reconstitution” was chosen quite explicitly. Activists considered the phrase “to return to the ayllu” as a way to describe the project but discarded it as they felt it signified too much a return to the past. It was decided that the term “reconstitution” was more appropriate. See, Benjamin Dangl, “Centuries March the Streets: The Power of the Past in Bolivian Indigenous Movements, 1970-2000,” PhD Dissertation, Department of History and Classical Studies, McGill University, 2017, pp. 198-199.

⁶ Murra notes that each ayllu owned dispersed, faraway, if frequently tiny parcels of land to deal with the environmental threats of high altitude agriculture, such as frosts that occur 250 or more nights per year. In fact, ayllu societies were able use frosts in a productive way. For instance, by exposing meats and vegetables to frost and sunshine in rapid succession would freeze-dry the food, allowing it to be stored for long periods of time without rotting. Thus, through cultivation in various ecological zones and domesticating cold weather by freeze-drying potatoes, known as *chuño*, and llama meat, known as *charki*, Andean ayllu communities were able to alleviate the effects of frosts, drought, and other

According to Choque and Mamani, ayllus are composed of three main elements: the recognition of communally owned property (although the land can be parcelized, it is understood that in the final instance property belongs to the ayllu community as a whole); it originates from precolonial times; and, while the organizational and political systems differ depending on place, kinship is always a central organizing component.⁷ Ayllus have been able to maintain their existence, although not unchanged, despite the European colonial and ensuing republican nation-state projects of eradicating the “savage” indigenous populations. According to one organizational leader, CONAMAQ understands their attempts to reconstitute the precolonial system of ayllus as a mandate handed down to them from generations past.⁸

Unlike other indigenous and peasant movement organizations that are interested in overthrowing the state through a revolutionary situation, CONAMAQ has historically been more interested in defending the rights of local communities and improving the viability of the ayllu form in contrast with, and at the expense of, the dominant state.⁹ After Bolivia’s 1952 national revolution, the state sought to impose a uniform model of *sindicatos* (unions) throughout the country in order to organize, regulate, and control the countryside. This corporatist process of state-directed

natural threats. See, John Murra, “Andean Societies,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 13 (1984), pp. 119-141.

⁷ Maria Eugenia Choque and Carlos Mamani, “Reconstitución del Ayllu y Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas: El Movimiento Indio en los Andes de Bolivia,” in *Los Andes desde los Andes*, (La Paz: Yachaywasi, 2003).

⁸ Author interview, Nilda Rojas, La Paz, April 2015.

⁹ Álvaro García Linera, Marxa Chavez León, and Patricia Costas Monje, *Sociología de los movimientos sociales en Bolivia: Estructuras de movilización, repertorios culturales y acción política*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2008), p. 337.

unionization sought to modernize the countryside through its economic, political, and social incorporation into the Bolivian nation state.¹⁰ According to Albó, this process of assimilation was an attempt to “re-baptize Indians as peasants,” meaning an attempt to homogenize the heterogeneous cultural composition of Bolivian society through the imposition of a more developed capitalist hierarchy of social classes.¹¹ This process of unionization and peasantization was uneven across the country. While many ayllus did convert to the union model of organization, in many areas, such as the southern highlands of Oruro and Potosí, indigenous communities continued to operate as ayllus and markas.¹² As Choque and Mamani note, “despite the presence of the peasant unions, the ayllu continued to express itself through symbolic representation, the territorial unity of collective land holdings, and the organizational and authority structure that still existed beneath the syndical form.”¹³

It was during the 1980s that the contemporary movement to reconstitute the ayllu form began to take off. A severe drought and economic crisis in the early 1980s led to the deterioration of agricultural production and worsening social conditions in many highland indigenous communities, which served as the principal motives for

¹⁰ For the best overviews of this process, see Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but not Defeated: Peasant Struggles Among the Aymara and Quechwa in Bolivia, 1900-1980*, (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1987); and, Javier Hurtado, *El Katarismo*, (La Paz: Biblioteca del Bicentenario de Bolivia, 2016 [1986]).

¹¹ Xavier Albó, “And from Kataristas to MNRistas? The Surprising and Bold Alliance between Aymaras and Neoliberals in Bolivia,” in Donna Lee Van Cott (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 57.

¹² Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “Liberal Democracy and Ayllu Democracy in Bolivia: The Case of Northern Potosí,” *The Journal of Development Studies*, 26:4 (1990), pp. 97-121.

¹³ Choque and Mamani, “Reconstitución del Ayllu y Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas,” p. 155.

reviving the ayllu as a move toward self-determination and sustainability.¹⁴ In 1985, the First Meeting of the Ayllus was held in the city of Potosí to discuss the viability of reforming the ayllu as a form of organization more representative of indigenous communities than the union model. Later, in the early 1990s, regional ayllu organizations began to form in order to counteract the continued push of sindicalization, such as the *Federación de Ayllus Originarios del Norte de Potosí* (FAOI-NP), the *Federación de Ayllus del Sur de Oruro* (FASOR), the *Consejo Occidental de Ayllus de Jach'a Carangas* (COAJC), and the *Federación de Ayllus y Comunidades Originarias de la Provincia Ingavi* (FACOPI). In 1994 these regional organizations joined together in the *Comision Impulsora para la Reconstitución de Ayllus de Bolivia* (CIAB), which in 1997 officially became CONAMAQ. The central goal of CONAMAQ has been to reconstitute the ayllu form of indigenous communal organization as “an attempt to institutionally practice their own cultural, economic, and political principles and values.”¹⁵

CONAMAQ is organized at the local level of the ayllu, through the medium level of the marka, to the largest regional level of the *suyu*. The organizational ayllu network is composed of primarily Aymara and Quechua communities in the departments of La Paz, Oruro, Potosí, Cochabamba, and Chuquisaca. Although organizational structures differ across CONAMAQ's member communities, the

¹⁴ Choque and Mamani, “Reconstitución del Ayllu y Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas,” p. 167; and, José Antonio Lucero, “Representing ‘Real Indians’: The Challenges of Indigenous Authenticity and Strategic Constructivism in Ecuador and Bolivia,” *Latin American Research Review*, 41:2 (2006), p. 44.

¹⁵ Cristóbal Huanca Salles, “Reconstitución del Ayllu: Los desafíos del movimiento indígena en Bolivia bajo el socialismo del Siglo XXI,” *LASA Forum*, Summer (2017), p. 31.

general authority structure of rotational leadership, *thaki*, and consensus-based decision-making present in all local ayllus also applies to CONAMAQ itself.

Tantachawis, or communal assemblies, are convened every year or bi-annually and bring together authorities from the network of local ayllus to discuss issues facing ayllu communities, to decide on CONAMAQ actions, and to decide new leaders.¹⁶

The growth of the ayllu movement that led to the creation of CONAMAQ was aided by both international and Bolivian NGOs, and a set of state reforms during the 1990s. International groups such as Oxfam America, the Inter-American Foundation, and the Denmark Foreign Aid Agency opted to fund projects working with ayllus and not unions, while Bolivian NGOs such as the *Taller de Historia Oral Andina* (Andean Oral History Workshop, THOA) worked to revitalize knowledge and recognition of the ayllu form. Additionally, national reforms such as the 1994 Law of Popular Participation and the 1996 Agrarian Reform Law (INRA) provided legal standing to indigenous communities, which allowed ayllus to officially register with the state as a *personeria juridical*. Despite its many flaws, INRA allowed indigenous people communally held land tenure rights, given these communities a material basis of subsistence and reproduction.¹⁷ According to Lucero, “given these new political,

¹⁶ Author interview, Gregorio Choque, La Paz, January 22, 2015.

¹⁷ On the role of NGOs in the formation of CONAMAQ, see Robert Andolina, “Between Local Authenticity and Global Accountability: The Ayllu Movement in Contemporary Bolivia,” in José Antonio Lucero (ed.), *Beyond the Lost Decade: Indigenous Movements, Development, and Democracy in Latin America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). For an analysis of the 1990s reforms, see Benjamin Kohl and Linda Farthing, *Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Hegemony and Popular Resistance*, (New York: Zed Books, 2006).

economic, and cultural benefits, many communities that previously identified as ‘peasant communities’ now opted for ‘reconstituting’ themselves as ayllus.”¹⁸

Early on, CONAMAQ was quick to distinguish itself from other social movement organizations like the CSUTCB that employed more aggressive and confrontational tactics of struggle. In 2000, when protests erupted in Cochabamba over a plan to privatize water and then spread across the country with the CSUTCB playing a central role in a more general repudiation of neoliberalism, the *mallkus* (leaders) of CONAMAQ were pictured in the press showing support for then-president Hugo Banzer, who was also a former military dictator in the 1970s, by presenting him with a poncho and an emblem of leadership (*báton de mando*). While only 90 kilometers from La Paz the military was using tanks to fire on indigenous protesters blockading highways, the *mallkus* of CONAMAQ claimed that ayllus, unlike unions, were not made for protesting but rather for negotiation and dialogue.¹⁹ Reaction from the organization’s base was swift, and soon a new leadership was elected.

With a new set of leaders, CONAMAQ took a more confrontational stance against the state and began participating in protests and road blockades as the country entered a period of serious social and political upheaval.²⁰ During this period, CONAMAQ joined the eastern lowland indigenous organization, CIDOB, in calling

¹⁸ Lucero, “Representing ‘Real Indians’,” p. 46.

¹⁹ García Linera, Chávez Leon, and Costas Monje, *Sociología de los movimientos sociales en Bolivia*, pp. 329, 331-332.

²⁰ For an excellent overview of the 2000-2005 insurrectionary cycle, see Forrest Hylton and Sinclair Thomson, “The Chequered Rainbow,” *New Left Review*, 35 (2005), pp. 41-64.

not only for an overthrow of the existing political system and an end to neoliberal policies, but also for a Constituent Assembly to “refound” Bolivia as a plurinational state. With the election in 2002 of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, a former president who had implemented the latest round of neoliberal reforms in the 1990s, CONAMAQ was quick to voice its opposition and played a role in the protests of October 2003 that forced his resignation.

As protests and road blockades continued to rack the country, plaguing the ensuing government of Carlos Mesa, CONAMAQ joined with various other movement organizations to form the Unity Pact. Like his predecessor, Mesa was ultimately forced to resign in June 2005 due to the almost constant state of insurrection that made the country ungovernable. With a new round of elections in December 2005, CONAMAQ and the Unity Pact provided a crucial base of support that saw the election of Evo Morales and the MAS to state power.

After the election, the Unity Pact’s calls to rewrite the constitution and refound the country along plurinational lines increased and Morales delivered, calling for a Constituent Assembly in 2006 which featured a significant number of campesino and indigenous representatives. Over the ensuing three years while the new constitution was being debated and drafted, Bolivia faced the risk of outright civil war as the old elite based in the eastern half of the country (known as the *media luna*) tried to impede the Assembly and violently clashed with supporters of the Unity Pact and the MAS. While disagreements began to arise between some member organizations of the Unity Pact and the government during the Assembly debates,

particularly around issues of resource extraction and indigenous autonomy, the threat coming from the opposition in the *media luna* was great enough to stave off any significant fissures internal to the ruling coalition for the time being.²¹

However, after a referendum on the new constitution in 2009 passed with 61% approval and Morales was elected to a new term with nearly 65% percent of the vote with the MAS gaining a majority in both chambers of the national legislature, the threat from the elite opposition subsided. According to Fernando Mayorga, this electoral victory heralded a strategic shift in the MAS's vision of social transformation. While during Morales' first term (2006-2009) the MAS relied on the supportive action of its base in the streets to defend the government against the opposition and to push forward the process of change, with a clear electoral majority the locus of attention turned toward the institutional political arena.²²

The effects of this shift on the relationship between the government and its indigenous movement supporters were most clearly demonstrated during the TIPNIS conflict, which led CONAMAQ and CIDOB to leave the Unity Pact. The protests against the TIPNIS highway worked to halt the road's construction but the dispute created a lot of tension between the government and its former indigenous movement supporters. When CONAMAQ and CIDOB left the Unity Pact they officially opposed the government, although factions within each organization thought it was a

²¹ For an in-depth account of the Constituent Assembly, see Salvador Schavelzon, *El nacimiento del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia: Etnografía de una Asamblea Constituyente*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2012).

²² Author interview, Fernando Mayorga, Cochabamba, August 31, 2013.

better strategy to remain aligned with the MAS.²³ These internal disagreements would provide an opportunity for the MAS to control dissent. According to Cancio Rojas, leader of CONAMAQ orgánico, “after the TIPNIS march was successful [and CONAMAQ and CIDOB withdrew their support of the government], the MAS planned to divide CIDOB with a parallel organization. After that, they strategized how to do the same thing to us in CONAMAQ.”²⁴

In December 2013, a dispute between the two factions over the election of new authorities led to a police siege of CONAMAQ’s headquarters, followed by a number of violent confrontations, hunger strikes, and blockades. After the initial fracas, the office sat unoccupied for a month as police dressed in riot gear secured the building and denied access to both factions while CONAMAQ orgánico set up a vigil outside in the street. On January 15, members of the CONAMAS faction led by Hilarión Mamani marched on the two-story building where another violent confrontation ensued. During the skirmish the police unlocked the doors and allowed CONAMAS to take the building.²⁵

After creating a parallel organization and violently taking control of the headquarters, CONAMAS receives significant funding from the government for development projects, services, and organizational goods like trucks and computers.²⁶

²³ Author interview, CONAMAQ member, August 15, 2013.

²⁴ Author interview, La Paz, February 2, 2015.

²⁵ For descriptions of the confrontation, see José Luis Saavedra, “Crónica de un toma gubernamental: El ataque a la sede del CONAMAQ,” *Nueva Crónica y Buen Gobierno*, 139 (2014); José Luis Saavedra, “Segunda parte: Crónica del ataque a la sede del CONAMAQ,” *Nueva Crónica y Buen Gobierno*, 140 (2014).

²⁶ Author interview, Cancio Rojas, La Paz, February 2, 2015; and, Emily Achtenberg, “Rival Factions in Bolivia’s CONAMAQ: Internal Conflict or Government Manipulation?” *NACLA*, available at

This has given the CONAMAS faction the ability to buy support from local ayllus communities and has left CONAMAQ orgánico considerably debilitated. If there was any doubt that the MAS exploited the internal division in an attempt to repress the dissent of CONAMAQ orgánico, only two days after initial ouster police occupied the offices of the Permanent Human Rights Assembly of Bolivia, which was providing office space to the displaced indigenous group, and forced out CONAMAQ.²⁷

While the MAS has been labeled authoritarian by some critics for interfering in the politics of an independent social organization, I argue that we can understand the government's intervention as a logical consequence of the MAS's vision and practice of social transformation based on the theory of hegemony and hegemonic change. This episode is an empirical expression of the underlying theoretical difference between the MAS government and some of its erstwhile indigenous supporters over the relationship between state and society and what this means for processes of social change. In order to further explain my argument, I now turn to a discussion of populism to show how populism operates as a political logic within hegemony.

Populism

<https://nacla.org/blog/2014/2/3/rival-factions-bolivias-conamaq-internal-conflict-or-government-manipulation>.

²⁷ Author interview, Cancio Rojas, February 2, 2015.

The literature on populism has consistently lamented the concept's lack of clarity and thus its utility for political analysis. As Ernesto Laclau has noted, few terms have been so widely used yet defined with less precision. "We know intuitively to what we refer when we call a movement or an ideology populist, but we have the greatest difficulty in translating the intuition into concepts."²⁸ This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the scholarly research on Latin American politics, where the practice of populism has been most widespread and where the concept has been most analyzed.

The debate over how best to define and theorize populism can be understood as occurring on three distinct levels. The first level relates to the causes behind the rise of populism and whether they are largely economic or political. The second revolves around the relationship between populism and democracy. Is populism best understood as a moment of popular democratic rupture where the voice of the people is finally expressed, or as an instance of authoritarian *caudillismo* where the people are merely used to increase the power of a charismatic leader? Finally, there is debate on whether populism is a practice of the left or of the right. Each of these levels will be discussed further below in order to highlight how they fail to adequately describe and explain populism, which only leads to further muddying the analytical waters around the concept. Following the work of Laclau and Jansen I argue that populism is best understood as a political *logic*, a specific type of politics that is situated as an

²⁸ Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, (Verso: New York, 2011 [1979]), p. 143.

internal periphery of hegemonic political practice.²⁹ That is, rather than trying to correctly define populism based on its economic or political ideological *content*, I wish to highlight the *form* itself as the key defining feature of populism in order to show how the MAS understands the political field and operates accordingly in its relations with other social actors such as CONAMAQ.

Based on the wave of populist leaders throughout Latin America in the middle of the twentieth century, scholars tended to highlight the economic determinants of the trend. Focusing largely on the countries of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, scholars saw populism as related to the specific peripheral location and pattern of development of Latin America in the international economy.³⁰ From the position of modernization theory, populism was an aberration of “backward” countries on the road from traditional to modern society and toward economic development. From a Marxist angle, populism arose from the growing influence of the working class as global capitalism further entrenched itself throughout the region. Populist leaders like Juan Peron and Getulio Vargas capitalized on the numerical power of workers and formed a cross-class coalition seeking to redefine the social and economic composition of society by taking political power. Although looking at the issue from

²⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, (New York: Verso, 2007); and, Robert S. Jansen, “Populist Mobilization: A new Theoretical Approach to Populism,” in Carlos de la Torre (ed.), *The Promise and Perils of Populism*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015).

³⁰ See, for instance, Gino Germani, *Authoritarianism, Fascism, and National Populism*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1978); Torcuato S. Di Tella, “Populism and Reform in Latin America,” in Claudio Veliz (ed.), *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); A. E. Van Niekerk, *Populism and Political Development in Latin America*, (Rotterdam: Rotterdam University Press, 1974); Michael L. Conniff, *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); and Guillermo O’Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism*, (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1979).

different perspectives, both modernization and Marxist approaches identified populism with a particular stage of economic development.

While scholars focused on the economic conditions of dependent development to explain the rise of populism in the mid twentieth century, the failures of the institutional political system were given prominence with the rise of neo-populism in the 1990s. In essence, populism was understood as a failure to properly incorporate citizens into political life through strong and stable political parties.³¹ As Roberts argues, populism “is a natural – though hardly an inevitable or exclusive – political strategy for appealing to mass constituencies where representative institutions are weak or discredited, and where various forms of social exclusion or political marginalization leave citizens alienated from such institutions.”³² From this position, without proper democratic incorporation through the representative institutions of political society, citizens are drawn to charismatic populist leaders who are outside the mainstream political institutions as the only way to express their voice and be heard, that is, to be represented. According to Roberts, populism thrives during crises

³¹ See, Kurt Weyland, “Neoliberal Populism in Latin America and Eastern Europe,” *Comparative Politics* 31:4 (1999), pp. 379-401; Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics,” *Comparative Politics*, 34:1 (2001), pp. 1-22; Kenneth M. Roberts, “Parties and Populism in Latin America,” in Carlos de la Torre and Cynthia J. Arnson (eds.), *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

³² Kenneth M. Roberts, “Populism, Political Mobilizations, and the Crises of Political Representation,” in Carlos de la Torre (ed.), *The Promise and Perils of Populism*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015), p. 141.

of representation where political institutions are incapable of marshaling the loyalty and allegiance of citizens.³³

Trying to determine the specific economic or political causal conditions of the populist phenomenon has historically produced contradictory claims for why, where, and how populism comes about. Scholars have also analyzed the relationship between populism and democracy with similarly contradictory results.³⁴ Where some analysts view populism as a fundamentally democratizing force, others see the critique and abandonment of political institutions as an authoritarian threat to democracy. On the one hand, populism can be seen as democratizing through the incorporation of popular classes into the political system either through their vote or their presence in the streets. On the other hand, the fact that this popular political activity occurs through movements that are often identified with charismatic leaders who disregard institutional constraints and employ a Manichaeian political discourse that fails to recognize a legitimate opposition raises the specter of authoritarianism.³⁵ While populism's relationship with democracy in Latin America has been debated since the first wave of populist leaders, with the rise of left-leaning governments since 2000 the discussion has become more intense. Largely focusing on the governments

³³ Roberts, "Populism, Political Mobilizations, and the Crises of Political Representation," pp. 146-150.

³⁴ See, Benjamin Arditi, *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism: Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Francisco Panizza, "Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy," in Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, (New York: Verso Press, 2010); Enrique Peruzzotti, "Populism in Democratic Times: Populism, Representative Democracy, and the Debate on Democratic Deepening," in Carlos de la Torre and Cynthia J. Arnson (eds.), *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

³⁵ Carlos de la Torre, *Populist Seduction in Latin America*, (Center for International Studies: Ohio University, 2010), pp. 26-27.

of Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, and Evo Morales in Bolivia, critics have argued that these populist leaders are threatening the political stability and democratic growth many countries in the region achieved through the 1980s wave of democratization. Weyland, for instance, argues that populism “inherently stands in tension with democracy and the value that it places upon pluralism, open debate, and fair competition,” and that Correa, Chavez, and Morales have “set about strangling democracy and putting competitive authoritarianism in its place.”³⁶

Critics also argue that the populist economic policies of these leaders will only lead to an era of commodity shortages, hyperinflation, capital flight, and economic ruin similar to the period before neoliberal stabilization.³⁷ What is more, even if populist leaders are able to implement policies that temporarily improve the welfare of the people, these advancements become politicized, they often suffer from inefficiency, problematic design and implementation, and in the end are not sustainable.³⁸

Yet, for proponents, populism opens a path to redeem the promise of popular sovereignty by placing “the people” at the center of political action. According to Peter Worsley, “insofar as populism plumps for the rights of majorities to make sure –by ‘intervening’ – that they are not ignored (as they commonly are) populism is

³⁶ Kurt Weyland, “The Threat from the Populist Left,” *Journal of Democracy*, 24:3 (2013), p. 18, 20.

³⁷ Sebastian Edwards, *Left Behind: Latin America and the False Promise of Populism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 169-175.

³⁸ Kurt Weyland, “Populism and Social Policy in Latin America,” in Carlos de la Torre and Cynthia J. Arnson (eds.), *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), pp. 117-118.

profoundly compatible with democracy.”³⁹ In a similar vein, Peruzzotti claims that populism offers a necessary check on the elitist logic that dominates contemporary representative democracy.⁴⁰

At a third level, scholars have debated whether populism ideologically aligns more with the left or the right.⁴¹ Similar to the discussion of populism’s relationship with democracy and its central causal determinants, populism’s ideological content is ambiguous and elastic. Whereas many contemporary leftist leaders of Latin America’s “Left Turn” have been identified as populists, the “neopopulists” of the 1980s and 1990s, such as Carlos Menem in Argentina, Alberto Fujimori in Peru, and Brazil’s Fernando Collor de Mello, implemented neoliberal policies and were aligned with the political right. Thus, while we may be able to identify specific populist movements as left-wing or right-wing, populism as a political practice lacks any innate or essential ideological correspondence. Because populism as an analytical concept and political practice spans the ideological spectrum and cannot be affixed to the left or the right, describing the concept in terms of its underlying ideology does little to refine its analytic utility.

Populism as Political Logic and Practice

³⁹ Peter Worsley, quoted in Ardit, *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism: Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation*, p. 43.

⁴⁰ Peruzzotti, “Populism in Democratic Times: Populism, Representative Democracy, and the Debate on Democratic Deepening,” p. 65.

⁴¹ See, for instance, Weyland, “The Threat from the Populist Left,”

The discussion above lays out the various ways in which scholars have attempted to define populism based on its *contents*. Scholars have been searching for a true essence of populism by analyzing a populist movement's social origins, its base supporters, its policy choices, or its ideological content. Yet, trying to define and theorize populism as a type of movement, regime, or ideology with specific ends toward which it is directed has failed to produce a coherent and useful conceptualization of the phenomenon. Rather than trying to define the term according to its economic or political determinants, or its ideological affinity, populism is best understood as a particular *form* of political activity.⁴² Following Laclau, I argue that populism is most usefully understood as a political logic.⁴³ For Laclau, the meaning of populism “is not to be found in any political or ideological content entering into the description of the practices of any particular group, but in a particular *mode of articulation* of whatever social, political, or ideological contents.”⁴⁴ In order to fully grasp this idea and to show its conceptual utility, it is worth analyzing Laclau's theoretical apparatus further.

To begin, Laclau focuses on the way in which social demands are expressed and whether those demands are satisfied or not, leaving aside the political or ideological substance of the demands themselves. If, for instance, a group makes a particular demand and that demand is then satisfied, we are in an instance of what Laclau calls a *logic of difference*. That is, all social actors accept the legitimacy of

⁴² Jansen, “Populist Mobilization,” p. 166.

⁴³ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 117.

⁴⁴ Ernesto Laclau, “Populism: What's in a Name?” in Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, (New York: Verso, 2005), p. 34.

the process, nobody questions the right to make the demand and the right of those in power to make a decision on whether or not to satisfy the demand. Logics of difference “presuppose that there is no social division and that any legitimate demand can be satisfied in a non-antagonistic, administrative way.”⁴⁵ But, what happens when a variety of different social demands are expressed and are not satisfied and met with silence? In this case, while the contents of the demands substantively differ, they do however share a similarity in that they have all been negated. A situation such as this where demands are linked on a negative basis is what Laclau labels a *logic of equivalence*. If these unsatisfied demands, despite their differential character, are seen as related due to their unfulfilled status by the social subjects making them, we have what Laclau calls an *equivalential chain* or a *chain of equivalences*. The demands within a chain of equivalence are linked based upon their negative character, that is, their lack of fulfillment, which requires the source of that negativity to be identified. Thus, the formation of a chain of equivalences divides the social into two distinct camps: those with the power the negate or fulfill demands (the elite, the oligarchy, the *ancien régime*, etc.), and those without power (the people, *el pueblo*). Here we have the structural components of populism understood as a form of political practice. “The more social demands tend to be differentially absorbed within a successful institutional system, the weaker the equivalential links will be and the more unlikely the constitution of a popular subjectivity; conversely, a situation in which a plurality of unsatisfied demands and an increasing inability of the

⁴⁵ Laclau, “Populism: What’s in a Name?” p. 36.

institutional system to absorb them differentially co-exist, creates the conditions leading to a populist rupture.”⁴⁶ Independent of the actual political or ideological contents of any particular movement, populism is understood to operate here as a specific mode of articulating social demands through an equivalential rather than a differential logic.

It is important to note that the appeals of various groups that link up to create the overarching equivalential chain of demands that splits the social into two contending camps are not coming from some pre-constituted social group (i.e. “the people”) with an already existing defined set of interests. Rather, it is the act of those various groups making the demands and forming a chain of equivalence itself that constitutes the historical subject of “the people”.⁴⁷ According to Panizza, populism is “a mode of identification in which the relation between its form (the people as signifier) and its content (the people as signified) is given by the very process of naming - that is, of establishing who the enemies of the people (and therefore the people itself) are.”⁴⁸ From Laclau’s perspective, populism is the political practice of constituting a national “universal will” with the ultimate goal of “creating hegemonically a unity – a homogeneity – out of an irreducible heterogeneity.”⁴⁹

It is from this view of populism, as a political logic within the realm of hegemony, that I would like to interpret the MAS government’s intervention in

⁴⁶ Laclau, “Populism: What’s in a Name?” pp. 36-37.

⁴⁷ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, pp. 72-73.

⁴⁸ Francisco Panizza, “Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy,” in Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, (New York: Verso, 2005), p. 3.

⁴⁹ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 182.

CONAMAQ that led to its division. In the following section I will examine two specific contradictions of populist hegemonic politics that are made apparent through the moment of CONAMAQ's separation and that help clarify how populism and hegemony are aligned in specific type of politics. I do this not to completely discount the strategic utility of populist hegemony, nor to completely vilify the MAS. Rather, I want to demonstrate that, despite Laclau's claim to the contrary, populism and hegemony are not synonymous with politics in general.⁵⁰ There are, in fact, different political logics and practices outside of populism and hegemony. First, I will highlight the internal contradictions of the logic of populist hegemony, before moving on to the issue of representation as one central indicator of difference between populist hegemony and plurinationality that the CONAMAQ dispute makes visible.

Populist Contradictions

As outlined above, the central feature of populism as a political logic is the creation of a chain of equivalences that brings together various disparate demands thereby assembling a unified historical popular subject, "the people", which, in turn, functions to split the social space into two opposing camps. From a strategic point of view, this political act makes sense in a context where the goal is to challenge an existing power bloc that is perceived to control a unified economic, political, and cultural space through the extension of its universal will throughout that social terrain. In order to challenge that power bloc, it makes sense to organize a

⁵⁰ Laclau, "Populism: What's in a Name?" pp. 47-48.

contending group that is composed on as broad a social basis as is possible. This process by which a unified social group called “the people” is constituted and struggles against the existing power bloc for economic, political, and cultural control of society is the political practice of hegemony. But, what happens when the chain of equivalence that is “the people” takes on a counterhegemonic potential and assumes hegemonic power? Despite the argument that the act of hegemonic formation itself changes the interests and demands of the groups involved,⁵¹ is it possible that the chain of equivalences that binds the people together dissolves after attaining hegemony, leaving the new hegemonic bloc in an ambiguous and contradictory position? What happens when the negated dimension of the social demands no longer holds the equivalential chain together against the previous hegemonic system? This is the contradictory moment of populist hegemony that leads to a reconfiguration of the equilibrium between coercion and consent in the equation of hegemony. We can see how this process unfolds in empirical terms when CONAMAQ revokes its support of the MAS government over the TIPNIS conflict in 2011 and the indigenous organization’s subsequent division.

During the period between the formation of the *Pacto de Unidad* in 2004, through the ascension of the MAS to state power in 2006 and the Constituent Assembly (2006-2009), until the TIPNIS conflict in 2011 and its fallout that effectively abolished an important pillar of support for the MAS as CONAMAQ and

⁵¹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, (New York: Verso, 1985); and, Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

CIDOB left the Unity Pact, the discourse around indigeneity had served as what Laclau calls an *empty signifier*. That is, indigeneity operated not simply as an ethnic identification but rather as a stand-in for a symbolic representation of the Bolivian people against the ruling neoliberal elite regime. As an empty signifier, indigeneity served as a representation of the chain of equivalences composed of the multitude of peasants, indigenous groups, neighborhood associations, labor unions, and other civil society organizations that challenged the old neoliberal elite and brought Morales and the MAS to power.

However, while the discourse around indigeneity and indigenous representation has always been a contested field, after Morales took power as the first indigenous president of Bolivia it became an even more important terrain of social struggle. Rather than serving as an empty signifier that operated to strategically homogenize what in reality was a heterogeneous social space, indigenous identity itself began to split into (at least) two contending camps. Scholars have analyzed how Morales and the MAS have attempted to define whom and what is “indigenous” based on distinctions between highland and lowland regions, and between territorialized and de-territorialized groups.⁵² Defining who is “indigenous” in any

⁵² See, Tom Perreault and B. Green, “Reworking the Spaces of Indigeneity: The Bolivian Ayllu and Lowland Autonomy Movements Compared,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 31 (2013), pp. 43-60; Donna Lee Van Cott, *From Movements to Parties in Latin America*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 49-98; Robert Albro, “The Indigenous in the Plural in Bolivian Oppositional Politics,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 24:4 (2005), pp. 433-453; Andrew McNeish, “Extraction, Protest and Indigeneity in Bolivia: The TIPNIS Effect,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 8:2 (2013), pp. 221-242; Andrew Canessa, “Conflict, claim and contradiction in the new ‘indigenous’ state of Bolivia,” *Critique of Anthropology*, 34:2 (2014), pp. 153-173; and, Álvaro García Linera, *Identidad Boliviana: Nación, Mestizaje, y Plurinacionalidad*, (La Paz: Vicepresidencia del Estado, 2014).

given society is always a contested and fundamentally political decision due to the fact that all representations are social constructions deriving from particular social struggles at particular historical moments in particular geographic places. Following Burman, I argue that in contemporary Bolivia Morales and the MAS have attempted to construct a hegemonic indigenous identity, which has come at the expense of a plurinational indigenous subject.⁵³ For Burman, “hegemonic indigeneity” is “intimately tied to notions of Bolivian nationhood and a strong Bolivian state” and emphasizes an indigenous identity that ultimately operates to maintain traditional systems of state power.⁵⁴ This hegemonic indigeneity is similar to what Charles Hale has labeled *el indio permitido*.⁵⁵ The version of indigeneity that is being put forth by Morales and the MAS is hegemonic not because it is dominant, but rather in the theoretical sense that it is not interested in projecting territorial and political visions beyond the Bolivian nation state, and it does not claim the right to self-government and the autonomous self-administration of indigenous territories outside the legibility and regulatory control of the state. The government’s hegemonic indigeneity, “constitutes no threat to the established notion of *la patria* [the national homeland]; rather it gives *la patria* indigenous legitimacy.”⁵⁶

This distinction between indigenous identities was demonstrated to me in conversations with leaders from CONAMAQ and the CSUTCB (*Confederación*

⁵³ Anders Burman, “‘Now we are Indígenas’: Hegemony and Indigeneity in the Bolivian Andes,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 9:3 (2014), pp. 247-271.

⁵⁴ Burman, “‘Now we are Indígenas’,” p. 260.

⁵⁵ Charles Hale, “Rethinking Indigenous Politics in the Era of the ‘Indio Permitido’”, *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 38:2 (2004), pp. 16-21.

⁵⁶ Burman, “‘Now we are Indígenas’,” p. 260.

Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia), Bolivia's national peasant union organization. Talking with Cancio Rojas, the *Tata Apu* [maximum authority] of CONAMAQ before the intervention, he told me that at the root of the government intervention lies an ideological and strategic difference between the politics of the MAS and those of the ayllus and suyus of CONAMAQ. Sitting in CONAMAQ organico's small apartment that serves as an office since the eviction from their old headquarters, Rojas told me that the MAS "holds a theoretical position of centralizing power, which includes defining indigenous people in ways that are in contrast with our own aspirations." He continued, "we want to form our own politics without being coopted, but with the MAS we continue to see how they attempt to control indigenous and original peoples and steer the indigenous movements toward their own goals of national consolidation and national power, not the desires and aspirations of our indigenous communities."⁵⁷ For Rojas, Morales and the MAS employ a rhetoric of indigenous peoples' rights for an international audience, but change their tune when it comes to their policies regarding indigenous peoples within Bolivia. In the latter case, he argues, the government tries to use indigenous ideas and language to promote the continued expansion of natural resource extraction and large-scale capitalist agricultural production in an attempt to "develop and modernize" Bolivia as a nation state. Yet, Rojas sees the MAS project in historical terms as only the latest attempt in a long line of nation-building schemes that have ultimately been unsuccessful and have come largely at the expense of the county's indigenous population. The

⁵⁷ Author interview, La Paz, February 2, 2015.

difference with the current situation is that the project is being led by an indigenous president with the espoused goal of creating an “indigenous state” for the benefit of Bolivia’s indigenous peoples.⁵⁸

While Rojas is extremely critical of the government’s developmental model and its attempts at circumscribing indigenous identity to fit its own goals, hegemonic indigeneity seems to hold sway in one of Bolivia’s other influential social movement organizations, the CSUTCB.⁵⁹ Mauricio Choque, the head of the CSUTCB’s Commission on Land and Territory, told me “Evo Morales is our indigenous brother, he is our brother President, he is our leader, he represents us. While we [the CSUTCB] maintain our independence, we support and follow our indigenous President.... We support Evo and the MAS government because they represent Bolivia’s indigenous people.” When asked about the relationship between the CSUTCB and CONAMAQ, Choque explained that the visions of the two movement organizations were very different. He described how the CSUTCB had fought and struggled for indigenous rights and to make Bolivia a more democratic country through protests, marches, strikes, and blockades, while CONAMAQ had historically done none of these things. CONAMAQ, he said, wasn’t interested in democratizing Bolivia because it wasn’t a “national” organization as it was only interested in

⁵⁸ See, Nancy Postero, *The Indigenous State: Race, Politics, and Performance in Plurinational Bolivia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017). Echoing Rojas, Postero argues that “Morales continues to invoke indigenous history and culture, but he does so in performances of a state-controlled version of indigeneity that legitimizes state power.... Moreover, the MAS government has made it clear that it will sacrifice some indigenous communities to its national development project” (pp. 4-5).

⁵⁹ It should be noted that this is the position of the current CSUTCB and its leadership. Like any other social movement organization, its ideological position has gone through various phases and its vision of ethnic indigenous identity, specifically in relation to the social class category of *campesino*, has changed over time in relation to the specific historical conjuncture.

regional struggles. “What do they mean when they talk about ‘reconstitution’? What are they going to reconstitute? They don’t want to reconstitute Bolivia. They want to split Bolivia apart. With their vision of social change, Bolivia as a nation would lose.”⁶⁰ What is important to note here is Choque’s ontological focus on the nation as the locus of struggle. The regional struggles of CONAMAQ, i.e. the reconstitution of the ayllu, come at the expense of the nation itself. He stated, “CONAMAQ calls themselves *originarias* [original peoples, indigenous]. Indigenous to where/what [*originaria de que*]? To me, and I say this with all due respect to CONAMAQ, they are not our indigenous brothers.” For Choque and the contemporary CSUTCB, imagining an indigenous identity outside the territorial confines of the Bolivian nation state is analogous to not being indigenous at all. To be indigenous from the perspective of hegemonic indigeneity means to be one of the original inhabitants of the Bolivian nation and to struggle for indigenous peoples is to struggle for Bolivian sovereignty at the level of the nation state.

Populism as a Mode of Representation

The different visions of whom and what constitutes being indigenous discussed above are central to the issue of populism because they are the very substance of who and what is represented through a populist movement. Representation, according to Pitkin is the “making present of something that is nevertheless absent.” Representation entails “acting for others,” which “means acting

⁶⁰ Author interview, La Paz, March 3, 2015.

in the interests of the represented, in a manner responsive to them.”⁶¹ The absent something is made present through an intermediary, such as a name, a symbol, or an agent that acts in the name of the represented. Accordingly, representation is a set of social and cultural processes through which identities are constructed by linking certain political subjects with larger political communities.⁶² Following Foucault, representation has a productive role in constructing the very thing it seeks to represent. That is, the political subject is itself a product of the process of representation.⁶³

Populism, then, as an act of representation, brings into existence the subject of which it seeks to represent: the people. According to Lucero, “populism depends on a representation that claims to mirror a certain reality, yet is more important in producing a version of reality.”⁶⁴ Thus, rather than reflecting an already existing social subject, populism brings into existence a specific social subject that suits its own goals. In the case of CONAMAQ analyzed here, the MAS government was attempting to not only quell the criticisms of a formerly supportive indigenous movement organization, but to also produce a particular type of indigenous subject that could be represented within the confines of *el pueblo Boliviano*. The production of specific subjects that become “the people” is the *sin qua non* of populism, and this can only be accomplished through the mechanisms of representation. Similar to

⁶¹ Hanna Pitkin, cited in Benjamin Arditi, “Populism as an Internal Periphery of Democratic Politics,” in Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, (New York: Verso, 2005), pp. 80-81.

⁶² Lucero, *Struggles of Voice*, p. 29.

⁶³ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), esp. chapters 3 and 7.

⁶⁴ Lucero, *Struggles of Voice*, p. 44.

Marx's scathing critique of the French peasantry in his *Eighteenth Brumaire*, which serves as one of the epigraphs to this chapter, the MAS assumes that a certain type of indigenous subject cannot represent themselves but need to be represented.⁶⁵ While the Bolivian people are indigenous, they have been exploited and divided for centuries and, as such, they must be unified, organized, and represented by the nation's first indigenous president in order to be liberated.

The whole idea of representation presupposes a bifurcation between the represented and those who act for them as their representative. This bifurcation therefore serves to distinguish representation from self-government, which presents a problem for populism and hegemony. If hegemony is about the creation of a universal will that guides a unified society through mechanisms of consent, populism is the political practice through which that universal will is constructed and projected in the form of "the people." However, there is a contradiction in this process when the populist leader is seen to embody the immediacy of the people while at the same time acting for them. There is an incongruity between the populist acting *as* the people and acting *for* the people. In other words, populism seeks to suspend the distance between the people and their representative while at the same time

⁶⁵ Marx argues "The small peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions, but without entering into manifold relations with one another.... In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that divide their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of other classes, and put them in hostile contrast to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no unity, no national union and no political organization, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented." In Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), p. 608.

maintaining the authority and control that the form of representative politics provides.⁶⁶

Conclusion: Plurinationality and Populist Hegemony

We are now in a position to fully grasp how the CONAMAQ intervention was a populist moment embedded within the MAS's overarching theory and practice of hegemonic social transformation. Additionally, we can see that, more than just a conflict over the direction of an indigenous movement organization, this episode highlights a distinction between how the MAS, on one hand, and proponents of plurinationality, on the other, understand indigeneity and representation in the context of differing views of the relation between state and society. When CONAMAQ rescinded their support from the government due to what they claimed were anti-indigenous policies, the MAS was threatened not only by a waning base of support, but more importantly by a challenge to its symbolic association with indigenous identity. If we recall, indigeneity served as the empty signifier that corresponded with the chain of equivalences that brought Bolivians together against the ruling neoliberal elite during the 2000-2005 insurrectionary period, which ultimately carried Morales and the MAS to power. Therefore, to have an important and influential indigenous movement such as CONAMAQ oppose the government threatened the MAS's control over the symbol of indigenous identity, which, in turn, compromised the entire hegemonic project of the MAS founded on an indigenous president

⁶⁶ Arditi, "Populism as an Internal Periphery of Democratic Politics," pp. 83-84.

governing and indigenous state. When the MAS was unable to maintain CONAMAQ's consent, they were compelled to use the mechanisms of coercion at their disposal to secure their hegemonic position.

The government's intervention in CONAMAQ was a strategic choice based on a reading of the political conjuncture structured by the MAS's theoretical reasoning around their vision of hegemonic social transformation. But, for theorists like Laclau, the logic of the populist and hegemonic form of politics is the universal form of politics, not just one option to choose amongst others. For instance, Laclau asks, "if populism consists in postulating a radical alternative within the communitarian space, a choice at a crossroads on which the future of a given society hinges, does not populism become synonymous with politics?" He responds that "the answer can only be affirmative," adding "the end of populism coincides with the end of politics."⁶⁷ Elsewhere he claims "hegemony is, in the final instance, an inherent dimension to all social practice."⁶⁸ If we agree with Laclau then it is possible to question the strategic effectiveness of the MAS's intervention, but the underlying political logic that, in the final instance, determines what is politically imaginable remains outside the realm of examination. But, are there other political logics that do not rely on splitting the social space into two contending camps by articulating a chain of equivalences in order to contend for power over an imagined social totality? Is it possible that the populist and hegemonic form of politics is just one possible form amongst others?

⁶⁷ Laclau, "Populism: What's in a Name?" pp. 47, 48.

⁶⁸ Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Times*, (New York: Verso, 1990), p. 212.

It may be difficult to imagine a non- or post-hegemonic form of politics, but scholars such as Virno, and Hardt and Negri have attempted to theorize a different form of politics through the concept of the “multitude.”⁶⁹ For Virno, the multitude is a plurality that persists as such in the public sphere without converging into a unified One, “which allows for the political-social existence of the *many* seen as being *many*.”⁷⁰ The multitude, then, provides us with a possibility where a political logic does not necessitate the homogenization of social heterogeneity. Instead, the multitude is a collection of singularities without equivalence, it is a plurality without unification. This is not to claim that the work of articulating various demands and identities together is useless or will happen simply by coincidence. Articulation remains an important political task in any process of social transformation but the concept of the multitude shows that there are other ways to conceive of articulation beyond populism and hegemony.

In Bolivia, the theory of plurinationality is an alternative form of politics that has been proposed by indigenous groups such as CONAMAQ. Similar to the multitude, plurinationality attempts to rethink society outside the confines of a hegemonic totality. The underlying logic of plurinationalism is not related to the construction of a universal will expressed through “the people,” but rather the proliferation of various different “peoples” with the ability to express their own demands through their own forms of representation. In that sense, plurinationality

⁶⁹ See Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004); and, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁷⁰ Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, pp. 21, 25.

also offers a different view of indigeneity. Whereas the MAS has attempted to construct a hegemonic indigeneity, proponents of plurinationality are interested in recognizing the plurality of indigenous identities and their various structures of political authority and systems of social organization. CONAMAQ's effort to reconstitute the ayllu has been a key part of building plurinationality as the ayllu provides an avenue for cultural recognition and the territorial basis for cultural reproduction. As Aymara activist and ex-vice president Víctor Hugo Cárdenas noted, "The ayllu is the principal cell, one of the foundations for the construction of a multiethnic and pluricultural democracy."⁷¹ It is through the ayllu that indigenous communities govern themselves directly, which does not completely eliminate the system of political representation but does overcome it at least at the local level.

A central demand of those who brought Evo Morales and the MAS to power was to refound Bolivia as a plurinational state. Despite the fact that the 2009 Constitution renamed the country the Plurinational State of Bolivia, I have demonstrated in this chapter through an analysis of the MAS intervention in CONAMAQ that populism and hegemony nevertheless provide the political logic for the MAS government. This disagreement over the form of political action is at the root of some of the most important social conflicts in the country today over the future trajectory of Bolivia's social transformation.

⁷¹ Quoted in Dangl, "Centuries March the Streets," p. 193, n. 27.

Transforming the State? The Possibilities and Ambiguities of Indigenous Autonomy in *El Estado Plurinacional*

Like the TIPNIS highway and the CONAMAQ split discussed in previous chapters, the struggle over indigenous autonomy is an important issue within Bolivia that illustrates the difference between hegemony and plurinationality. The 2009 Constitution recognizes four types of autonomy: regional, departmental, municipal, and indigenous. While regional, departmental, and municipal autonomies could serve as important avenues for the limited decentralization of power, they maintain much of the institutional and territorial logic of the liberal nation-state. As Exeni Rodríguez argues, “indigenous autonomies constitute the essence of plurinationality” because they “are not only about the redistribution of power, decision-making, and resources to the local community level, but also about something much more substantial: the exercise of the rights to free determination and self-government.”¹ Indigenous communities’ free determination and self-government allows them to control their own territories and decide how resources in their territories are exploited (or not) and by whom, presenting a potential obstacle to the continued extraction of natural resources controlled by the state, which has been the centerpiece of the MAS’s development model. Indigenous autonomy challenges the government’s hegemonic state project as a curb on extractivism would undercut the state’s material foundation

¹ José Luis Exeni Rodríguez, “Autogobierno indígena y alternativas al desarrollo,” in José Luis Exeni Rodríguez (ed.), *La larga marcha: El proceso de autonomías indígenas en Bolivia*, (La Paz: Fundación Rosa Luxemburg, 2015), p. 15.

while the formation of truly autonomous spaces would inhibit the territorial reach of the state.

If Bolivia is actually on the road to reconfiguring the nation and state along plurinational lines then AIOC is a necessary element of these transformations. However, in this chapter I also want to think about the possible contradictions and unintended consequences that might come about through the construction of official, state-sanctioned indigenous autonomies? Charles Hale has suggested that the demand for indigenous autonomy as a form of resistance “is losing traction as a path towards expansive political change, because it is increasingly entangled with the very structures of dominance that these communities intend to resist.”² Therefore, it is important to ask: in what ways might a grassroots demand such as indigenous community autonomy be incorporated into the state’s governing apparatus in order to make indigenous communities legible to the state and therefore more easily regulated and managed?

James Scott’s notion of *legibility* provides an entry point to the type of phenomena I am pointing to. For Scott, all states have historically tried to simplify unwieldy and diverse societies in order to more easily understand, manipulate, and govern them.³ Similarly, Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose refer to “rationalities of government,” whereby certain “objects” are constituted and become knowable and

² Charles Hale, “Resistencia para que? Territory, autonomy and neoliberal entanglements in the ‘empty spaces’ of Central America,” *Economy and Society*, 40:2, (2011), p. 189.

³ James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

are therefore open to intervention and regulation.⁴ I am interested here in the ways that AIOC operates dialectically, that is, as a process of state transformation while at the same time possibly working to make autonomous community practices more legible to the state and thus more prone to the rationalities of government.

This should not be taken to imply that the state's only role is to regulate society and ensure compliance with its dictates. While the state is most certainly a regulatory actor, it is also a provider of goods and services and a powerful apparatus in any process of social transformation. However, these two ostensibly distinct visions of the state are really just two sides of the same coin. In order for services to be rendered by the state, groups receiving those services need to be legible to it. As Dombrowski notes, "recognition by power can, and increasingly does, involve as many problems as the neglect and marginalization that comes from an absence of state interest."⁵ By thinking in terms of legibility, recognition, and the rationalities of government I am not thinking about the state only as a negative and controlling force, but rather as an institutionalized social relationship that opens up certain possibilities while foreclosing others.

AIOC is a necessary part of any meaningful plurinational project in Bolivia. Moreover, if plurinationality is understood as a fundamental transformation and decolonization of the state and society, AIOC is an essential element in pushing that process forward and helping to institutionally and territorially shift power to local

⁴ Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social, and Personal Life*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

⁵ Quoted in Andrew Canessa, "Conflict, claim and contradiction in the new 'indigenous' state of Bolivia." *Critique of Anthropology* 34:2 (2014), p. 164.

indigenous communities, thereby changing the structure of the state and its relation to society. However, this change does not come without substantial risks. As detailed below, the organization and institutionalization of rural peasant *sindicatos* that commenced soon after the 1952 revolution and the multicultural reforms of the 1990s are important historical examples of how previous attempts at state transformation in Bolivia that might have increased popular and democratic participation in social and political life while also creating greater regulatory control and governability of Bolivia's indigenous populations.

These two important periods of Bolivian political history demonstrate the dialectical processes of state transformation. As theorized and empirically substantiated below, the introduction of significant reforms by the central state during the 1950s and 1990s in rural communities made the political operations of these communities more legible to the state. The fact that communities may become more legible to the state and open to the rationalities of government does not in any way delegitimize nor devalue the importance of indigenous autonomy in the contemporary period. Quite the contrary, as the process of constructing a plurinational state develops, of which AIOC is a necessary element questions need to be raised about the possibilities and contradictions of the process. Power operates in a dialectal manner, meaning that as social relations of power change certain possibilities open up while others are foreclosed. This is not a normative argument for one side or the other, but rather an analysis of power. My argument is that, given the significance and dialectical nature of past processes of change, it behooves us to analyze and interpret

the institution of indigenous autonomy in a similar manner as a number of communities move forward in the process.

What is the State?

Before moving on to examine AIOC as a necessary component in the process of state transformation in contemporary Bolivia, it is worth pausing in order to lay out what exactly I mean when I talk about the state. Providing a clear definition of “the state” has proven a difficult task. According Philip Abrams, the state, “conceived of as a substantial entity separate from society has proved a remarkably elusive object of analysis,” and “like *the* town and *the* family, is a spurious object of sociological concern.”⁶ Similarly, Ralph Miliband argues “there is one preliminary problem about the state which is very seldom considered, yet which requires attention if the discussion of its nature and role is to be properly focused. This is the fact that ‘the state’ is not a thing, that it does not, as such, exist.”⁷ Following Abrams and Miliband, defining the state and analyzing its transformation can be a challenging if not impossible endeavor. Any attempt to analyze *the* state as a completely autonomous entity outside of and above society will only lead to the reification of the state, hindering both an analysis of the thing itself and the possibilities of its transformation.

⁶ Philip Abrams, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State,” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1:1 ([1977] 1988), pp. 61, 63.

⁷ Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1969), p. 49.

Any attempt to define the state we must take into account Weber's famous description that the state is "the form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical violence within a particular territory."⁸ However, while many scholars rely on this definition, Weber also argues "the state represents a relationship in which people rule over other people. This relationship is based on the legitimate use of force (that is to say, force that is perceived as legitimate)."⁹ It is important to note here that for Weber the state is not some autonomous thing outside of or separate from society. The state does not stand apart from society as a set of essential intentions or preferences, just like individuals are not units of autonomous consciousness and desire distinct from their material or social world.¹⁰ Rather, the state is what Nicos Poulantzas has argued as the material condensation of a relationship of social forces. For Poulantzas, the state should not be seen as an intrinsic entity, rather as "a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions, such as this is expressed with the State in a necessarily specific form."¹¹ (128-129). Similarly, García Linera argues the state should be understood as a mechanism whereby the political correlation of social forces and a collective and shared moral consensus are institutionalized.¹² In other words, the state is formed and defined

⁸ Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (eds.), (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), p. 33.

⁹ Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, p. 34.

¹⁰ See, Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," *The American Political Science Review*, 85:1 (1991), p. 88.

¹¹ Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, (New York: Verso, [1978] 2014), pp. 128-129.

¹² See, Álvaro García Linera, "The State in Transition: Power Bloc and Point of Bifurcation," *Latin American Perspectives*, 37:4 (2010), pp. 34-47.

through a process of social struggle whereby the social relations of economic and cultural production in a specific place and time are consolidated into a political relationship of domination and subordination.

This does not mean that the state as such is merely a tool of the dominant class or hegemonic bloc. The contemporary form of the capitalist state is a relatively autonomous entity, meaning that those fractions of social classes and groups that control the state are variable despite the fact that the central functions of the state remain the same. As such, the state, or at least parts of the state apparatus, may become accessible and open to the intervention of popular social forces at certain times. Conceptualizing the state simply as an apparatus used to dominate, control, and exploit subordinate groups reifies the state while also failing to account for the many apparent contradictions within the state itself.

Examples of this contradictory process can be seen when different parts of the state apparatus come into conflict. Perhaps the clearest instance is a military coup toppling a democratically elected leader. But, in a more subtle manner in contemporary MAS-dominated Bolivia, we see these types of contradictions playing out between competing strategies of state transformation and economic development based on the ideological visions of indigeneity and nationalism, or plurinationality and hegemony.¹³ According to Mitchell, “such conflict is an important indication of the

¹³ See Fernando Mayorga, *Incertidumbres tácticas: Ensayos sobre democracia, populismo y ciudadanía*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2014); Nancy Postero, “Morales’s MAS Government: Building Indigenous Popular Hegemony in Bolivia,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 37:18 (2010), pp. 18-34; and, Pablo Regalsky, “Political Processes and the Reconfiguration of the State in Bolivia,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 37:3 (2010), pp. 35-50.

permeability of state boundaries because it enables one to trace how wider social differences reproduce themselves with the processes of the state.”¹⁴

But, just as we should abandon the image of the state as a completely autonomous agent issuing orders, we also need to question the notion of resistance as emanating from an actor or location completely independent of the state. “Political subjects and their modes of resistance are formed as much within the organizational terrain we call the state,” Mitchell argues, “rather than in some wholly exterior social space.”¹⁵ We therefore should not think about the demand for indigenous autonomy as coming from a space completely outside the sphere of the state or a demand for the creation of a territorial space beyond the reach of the state, but rather as a factor in the changing dynamics between various social forces in Bolivia. The indigenous organizations that brought Morales and the MAS to power and have demanded indigenous autonomy proposed a new state form in which “political collectivities could express agreement and make decisions about the core issues of the state,” according to Garcés. “These positions put into question the idea that the state has unique and absolute sovereignty over its territory and raised the possibility of creating plural forms of self-government (within indigenous peoples’ territories) and co-government (between the indigenous peoples and the plurinational state).”¹⁶ It is

¹⁴ Mitchell, “The Limits of the State,” p. 88.

¹⁵ Mitchell, “The Limits of the State,” p. 93.

¹⁶ Fernando Garcés, “The Domestication of Indigenous Autonomies in Bolivia: From the Pact of Unity to the New Constitution,” in Nicole Fabricant and Bret Gustafson (eds.), *Remapping Bolivia: Resources, Territory, and Indigeneity in a Plurinational State*, (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2011), p. 53.

precisely this conceptualization that informed and motivated activists to mobilize for local autonomy through the construction of AIOC.

In this sense, indigenous demands for autonomy are not a form of resistance against “the state” in general, but rather against a particular historical form of the state in which indigenous Bolivians have been situated in a subaltern position. Through their demands for a constituent assembly to “refound” Bolivia as a plurinational state with indigenous autonomies, Bolivia’s indigenous peoples are proposing an alternative form of state. This new state form is significant, according to Garcés, because it represents “a departure from the classical sense of the struggle against the state, or the struggle to take or capture state power. The issues are *which* kind of state the people will make and whether and how it might be constructed – whether they can construct an Other kind of state that resolves the historical discrimination and exclusion to which they have been subjected since the creation of the colonial republic.”¹⁷ The relational view of the state and resistance pushes us to rethink the analytical division between the state and society while also clarifying the seemingly contradiction between demanding indigenous autonomy while at the same time possibly further incorporating autonomous municipalities into the regulatory state apparatus.

Indigenous Autonomy and the Plurinational State

¹⁷ Garcés, “The Domestication of Indigenous Autonomies in Bolivia,” p. 63.

Autonomy and self-governance for indigenous groups has been a recurring historic demand Bolivian.¹⁸ However, the demand for indigenous autonomy has often conflicted with the desire for popular control over the state. As Albó has noted, two seemingly contradictory tendencies emerged within Bolivia's indigenous movements. The first advocates for the "winning of autonomous terrain in the face of a state considered inefficient, if not allied with the capitalist sectors," while the other tendency "seeks full participation in the state as a means of controlling the government."¹⁹ The most recent wave of demands for indigenous autonomy began in the 1980s and were articulated largely by indigenous peoples in the eastern lowlands. Later, through the 1990s and into the 2000-2005 period, the demand for indigenous autonomy grew to encompass indigenous groups across the country.

The Bolivian state responded to these demands by implementing processes of decentralization and neoliberal multiculturalism over the course of the 1990s. The 1994 Law of Popular Participation (LPP) was the cornerstone of Bolivia's neoliberal decentralization plan. While critics argued that the LPP shifted responsibilities and accountability from the national to the subnational level as a pretext for reducing public services, the law contained certain important measures for indigenous

¹⁸ Roberto Choque Canqui, *El Indigenismo y los Movimientos Indígenas en Bolivia*, (La Paz: Instituto Internacional de Integración del Convenio Andrés Bello, 2014); Fernando Garcés, *Los Indígenas y su Estado (pluri)nacional: Una Mirada al proceso constituyente boliviano*, (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2013).

¹⁹ Xavier Albó, "From MNRistas to Kataristas to Katari," in Steven J. Stern (ed.), *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, 18th to 20th Centuries*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 408-409.

autonomy, such as recognizing peasant and indigenous communities.²⁰ In addition, the 1996 INRA agrarian reform law established *Tierras Comunitarias de Origen* (TCO), which recognized indigenous communally held lands. While these initiatives were certainly a response to indigenous demands for autonomy and self-determination, they were nonetheless partial concessions in a larger process of restructuring the Bolivian state along (neo)liberal democratic lines.

Thus, while indigenous autonomy and neoliberal processes of decentralization share certain similarities, they fundamentally differ in that decentralization upholds the liberal state form and its attendant systems of representation, authority, and accountability, while indigenous autonomy challenges the liberal form of the state and seeks to move beyond it. Indeed, AIOC is part of the territorial decentralization of power under the Plurinational State and is intended as a reconfiguration of the liberal democratic state through the implementation of indigenous free determination and self-government based on their own models of social and political organization, representation, and authority. According to Tockman and Cameron, indigenous autonomy implies “a radical break with liberalism...and a questioning of the entire edifice of the nation-state and the liberal principles that sustain it.”²¹ Similarly, Regalsky argues that indigenous autonomy “represents a challenge to the culturally homogenizing forms of the nation-state.... [and] presupposes the end of a type of government based on the fundamental principles of cultural homogeneity and

²⁰ Benjamin Kohl and Linda Farthing, *Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Hegemony and Popular Resistance*, (New York: Zed Books, 2006), pp. 130-131.

²¹ Jason Tockman and John Cameron, “Indigenous Autonomy and the Contradictions of Plurinationalism in Bolivia,” *Latin American Politics and Society*, 56:3 (2014), p. 49.

juridical monism.”²² AIOC thus forms one aspect of a much larger project of transforming the state structure in contemporary Bolivia.

The 2009 constitution recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to govern their territories and officially established the process for indigenous municipalities to become *Autonomías Indígenas Originarias Campesinas* (Indigenous Original Peasant Autonomies, AIOC).²³ The Framework Law of Autonomies and Decentralization (*Ley Marco de Autonomías y Descentralización*, LMAD) was passed in 2010 and further clarifies the specific requirements for the creation and jurisdiction of AIOCs. The administrative and territorial boundaries of AIOCs correspond with the municipal system of government already in place, which somewhat constricts the transformative possibilities. While AIOCs are legally accorded certain rights such as jurisdiction over indigenous justice and the ability to design their own governing institutions, AIOC control over nonrenewable natural resources remains an issue of debate. Article 349 of the 2009 constitution gives control over natural resources to the national state, indigenous groups have challenged this with reference to other parts of the document that recognize indigenous territory, the right to prior and informed consultation, and through the construction of AIOC. Therefore, a central factor in determining the depth of indigenous autonomy in plurinational Bolivia is the degree to which the state practices meaningful informed and prior consultation and/or consent, particularly when it comes to natural resource extraction. Since indigenous

²² Regalsky, “Political Processes and the Reconfiguration of the State in Bolivia,” pp. 41-42.

²³ Articles 2 and 290 specifically recognize indigenous rights to territory and autonomy as essential elements of plurinationality.

notions of territory include subsoil resources, control over these resources could seriously challenge the MAS government's extractive model of development, its political power, and its hegemonic project. Thus, whether or not the consultation process includes consent and the power of veto for AIOCs is an important factor determining the actuality of indigenous autonomy and, in turn, plurinationality.

In the following sections I examine the AIOC process in three separate indigenous municipalities across the country (see Figure 1). I first explain how and why AIOC failed to pass the final referendum in Totora Marka. Next, I examine how the community of Jesús de Machaca has essentially abandoned the AIOC process but has nonetheless continued to construct indigenous autonomy outside the official framework. I then analyze the way in which the municipality of Charagua successfully completed all the necessary bureaucratic procedures and has begun formally institutionalizing AIOC. As will be demonstrated below, the role of conflicting local social forces combined with MAS-government action operated in different ways producing different outcomes in Totora Marka, Jesús de Machaca, and Charagua.



Figure 1: 3 AIOC municipalities. Charagua, Jesús de Machaca, and Totorá are highlighted.

Totora Marka: The Defeat of AIOC

The capital of Totora is over 4000 meters above sea level and some areas of the municipality are over 1000 meters higher. There are nine *ayllus*, the main unit of indigenous territories in the highlands, made up of 32 communities composed of 515 family units with an estimated population of slightly under 5000. Cold and dry weather patterns combine with soil conditions to allow for the cultivation of a limited number of crops (including quinoa and over a hundred varieties of potatoes) and livestock (including llamas and alpacas), with hopes for developing tourism. Poverty is widespread and identified by many in the community to be the most important problem to be overcome. Many local autonomy advocates expressed hope that AIOC would somehow allow the community to mitigate this poverty. However, despite years of various groups within the community pushing for autonomy, on September 20, 2015 the *comuneros* of Totora voted against the establishment of an AIOC in pretty staggering numbers. Whereas the initial vote to embark on the AIOC process in December 2009 passed with 65 percent approval, the 2015 referendum was a landslide defeat as 70 percent of the population voted against AIOC.²⁴ A number of important factors played a role in this reversal, including the concerted effort of the MAS against the initiative, community cleavages between residents and *comuneros*, and the internal conflicts of the local pro-autonomy leadership. A fierce campaign was waged against AIOC because of the implications it had for the continuation of MAS party control of the municipality and a perceived threat that some of Totora's

²⁴ In the final 2015 referendum, 1,384 people voted against AIOC and 592 voted in favor.

part-time inhabitants felt in relation to issues of land tenure. These two factors, combined with the inability of AIOC proponents to counter the campaign against autonomy, shed light on Totora's shifting position on AIOC.

In Totora, indigenous autonomy envisioned the eclipse of some liberal democratic institutions and processes, including the process by which public authorities are chosen. Political parties and elections were to be replaced by selecting leaders through the deliberative assembly, known as the *Jacha Mara Tantachawi*, based on traditional *usos y costumbres* (norms and procedures). It was this shift of power and decision-making that was at the heart of what was decided by the referendum in September 2015. In the local elections of April 2015, the MAS candidate was elected mayor along with five *concejales* (council members), three from the MAS and two from a local electoral vehicle. The Totora AIOC statute stipulated that if AIOC was approved by referendum mid-way through an elected government, the incumbents would be removed from office mid-way through their terms. This represented a threat to the incumbents' position and motivated them to unite against the AIOC referendum. Their public position for doing so had a number of elements, most importantly that a No vote would result in an increase in public spending while a Yes vote would result in a loss of national funding to existing projects that would have to be compensated for by the imposition of a local tax.²⁵ While some representatives from the Ministry of Autonomies tried to assure the local population that a Yes vote would not lead to a loss of funding, the head of the United

²⁵ Author interview with local council member, Totora, August 22, 2015.

Nations in Bolivia, speaking at a large public gathering organized to promote AIOC in September 2015, indicated to those in attendance that AIOC would in fact bring increased funding from external sources. Nevertheless, the assertions of the local MAS government seemed to persuade a majority of voters.

Additionally, Totorá's autonomy statute took a very strong position on local control over natural resources, putting it into direct conflict with the MAS's hegemonic project which asserts that the national government maintains jurisdiction in this area. Thus, while local MAS officials fought against AIOC to maintain their political power, it is not unreasonable to speculate that at the national level the MAS also sought to defeat AIOC as it might impede the state's access to natural resources in the municipality.

There were also allegations that illegal campaign practices contributed to the success of the No vote. A number of observers, including officials from the Ministry of Autonomy and representatives of the Federal Electoral Commission (*Tribunal Supremo Electoral*, TSE) that were on site on election day, described how a police car drove around town on the day of the election handing out Pro-No pamphlets, a clear violation of electoral law.²⁶

Every year community members elect a new indigenous authority – the *Tata Mallku* (supreme leader) and *Mama T'allas* (accompanying women partners), and the *Tamanis* (traditional indigenous authorities). During the Yes campaign, Tata Miguel Soto worked to inform voters and convince them that AIOC was in their interest.

²⁶ Author interview, La Paz, September 16, 2016.

Although he was assisted in his efforts by a few of the *Tamanis*, the rest were, to quote Guarachi, “most noticeable for their absence.”²⁷ In fact, according to Guarachi, the majority of *Tamanis* do not live in Totora full time and, as such, were unable to effectively inform the community regarding issues surrounding AIOC. For example, once the Totora statute was approved in April 2015 by the TSE to be voted upon by referendum the following September, the plan was made to execute a public education program throughout the municipality. The majority of the *estatuyentes* (those in charge of carrying the statute forward) did not show up. Policarpio Ancari, who headed this effort, worked with the assistance of only a few of the *estatuyentes*. This lack of unity and organization amongst a committed leadership was an important factor in hindering the movement for AIOC.

An additional factor contributing to the failure of AIOC was the cleavage between *residentes* (residents, people who do not live full time in the community) and *comuneros* (communal members, or people who do live in the community full time). In Totora, close to 40 percent of the population are residents that temporarily migrate to places such as La Paz, Oruro, Cochabamba, and Chile.²⁸ A number of people I spoke with claimed that a majority of residents voted against the proposal, although I have not seen any polling data to substantiate these assertions. Residents, the argument goes, believed that a vote in favor of AIOC would expand collective land

²⁷ Author interview with Paulino Guarachi, El Alto, September 8, 2015.

²⁸ Paulino Guarachi Huanca, “Totora Marka: Chakanización de la autonomía originaria,” in José Luis Exeni Rodríguez (ed.), *La larga marcha: El proceso de autonomías indígenas en Bolivia*, (La Paz: Fundación Rosa Luxemburg, 2015), p. 86.

tenure, while opposing AIOC would result in land being converted to individual and family ownership. Residents favored individual and family ownership because they thought they would lose access to the land collectively held and worked by communal members. Despite repeated claims that converting to AIOC would not automatically result in the transformation of land tenure by government officials and community leaders at a series of public and private meetings with community members, this remained an important area of disagreement amongst the community.

Evangelicals living full or part time in Totora also had a fairly consistent message against AIOC, arguing that the statutes would obligate them to venerate Pachamama, chew coca, buy and drink alcohol, all of which they argued are anti-Christian. In addition, some of the local teachers joined forces with the No vote, telling their students that AIOC would result in loss of support for the schools and increased taxation on the students, and that without this revenue stream the professors would not be paid and the schools would close. Young people, for their part, questioned the desirability of empowering a deliberative assembly leadership to which they would have little access. For instance, Article 88 of the statute outlines a number of requirements for holding local office that would exclude both residents and young people.

During the public promotion and education phase in Totora, AIOC advocates focused too much on the technocratic and legalistic details of the statutes and not enough on the politics of the community, which would have better enabled them to realistically define and thus perhaps overcome political resistance. This included

meetings between government officials and local populations being dominated by the former which led to the exclusion of community members being effectively encouraged to take ownership of the process wherein they could have more effectively articulated local priorities and developed more effective strategies to overcome local objections. Wilfredo Plata emphasized that the most important issue to most people in indigenous communities is poverty and advocated the need to articulate in much more convincing ways how AIOC would specifically address and alleviate poverty.²⁹

Jesús de Machaca: Indigenous Autonomy “Sin Permiso”

Jesús de Machaca (JdM) is located approximately 60 miles southwest of La Paz with most of the population living at about 4000 meters. The overwhelming majority of the approximately 15,000 people who live there identify as Aymara with a small minority of Uru people. Rates of rural to urban migration, specifically to El Alto and La Paz, are high and many households maintain complex living and working relationships outside of the municipality.

As recently as the 1950s, the community was organized into two areas, or moieties, of approximately equal size following the complementary social organization common to Andean societies, *Arax Suxta* (Above) and *Manqha Suxta* (Below), each with six ayllus. However, for a variety of reasons, today Arax Suxta has seven ayllus while Manqha Suxta has 19, with the latter occupying 75-80 percent

²⁹ Author interview, La Paz, August 19, 2015.

of the total territory of the municipality. More consequential, what was once one *marka*, the larger territorial unit that encompasses local ayllus, is now two, a process that began during the 1990s, when Arax Suxta began to refer to itself as a separate and distinct marka. Significant differences now exist between MACOAS (Marka of Ayllus and Ancestral Communities of Arax Suxta) and MACOJMA (Federation of Ayllus and Ancestral Communities of Jesús de Machaca). While the inability to come to a mutually agreed upon power sharing agreement to be the single most important obstacle to the official AIOC process in JdM, this impasse toward AIOC has not stalled the operation of indigenous autonomy. Rather, the administration of autonomous governance based on the rotation of power, the notion of the *thakhi* (the path of increasing obligation, responsibility and prestige for communal members), and the decision-making power of the communal *cabildo* assembly has taken place outside of the official state-sanctioned AIOC process.

JdM “has a long history of rebellion and demonstrated capacity to maintain its way of being, without kowtowing to spoliations and impositions from external forces.”³⁰ However, this is not to say that JdM has been immune to those “external forces” that have attempted to insert themselves and influence the community.³¹ The municipality’s history of fierce resistance and independence and the continuity of

³⁰ Xavier Albó, *Tres municipios andinos camino a la autonomía indígena: Jesús de Machaca, Chayanta, and Tarabuco*, (La Paz: CIPCA, 2012), p. 27.

³¹ For an exhaustive overview of the rebellious history of Jesús de Machaca, see the three-volume history published by CIPCA. Roberto Choque Canqui, *Jesús de Machaca: La marka rebelde, Volume 1: Cinco siglos de historia*, La Paz: CIPCA and Plural Editores, 2003); Roberto Choque Canqui and Esteban Ticona, *Jesús de Machaca: La marka rebelde, Volume 2: Sublevación y massacre de 1921*, (La Paz: CIPCA, 1996); and, Esteban Ticona and Xavier Albó, *Jesús de Machaca: La marka rebelde, Volume 3: La lucha por el poder comunal*. La Paz: CIPCA, 1997).

collective land ownership are fundamental to why JdM has been able to continue its autonomy process despite being stalled on the path toward constructing an official, state-sanctioned AIOC.

JdM's ancestral community organization was able to remain intact, although seriously weakened by the syndicalism introduced in the 1950s. As detailed by Cameron and Colque, the *sindicato* system "was instituted in Jesús de Machaca and throughout the Altiplano through a combination of state coercion and clientelist seduction, as well as through the leadership of Aymara peasants who internalized and promoted the modernizing ideology of the state." Reflecting national trends, the ancestral system in JdM reached its nadir in the mid-1980s before beginning its "subsequent (selective) reconstruction and re-invigoration."³²

Prior to the first municipal elections held in 2004, it was decided that the mayor and council members (*concejales*) would be selected according to *usos y costumbres* (traditional norms and procedures) rather than by liberal democratic procedure. The community decided to divide all *ayllus* of both *markas* into five districts, and on this basis to rotate amongst the districts, which would thereby replace political party competition. The agreement eventually broke down and a disgruntled loser in the process opted to run on a party ticket.³³ Despite the fact that MACOJMA nominated leader won the election easily with 64 percent of the vote, the persistence

³² John Cameron and Gonzalo Colque, "The Difficult Marriage of Liberal and Indigenous Democracy in Jesús de Machaca, Bolivia," *Struggles for Local Democracy in the Andes*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009), p. 153.

³³ Gonzalo Colque, "Gobierno local comunitario en Jesús de Machaca. Apuntes para convertir el Gobierno Municipal en Gobierno de Ayllus y Comunidades," in Mario Galindo (ed.), *Municipio indígena: Análisis el proceso y perspectivas viables*, (La Paz: CEBEM, 2008), pp. 88-91; Albó, *Tres municipios andinos camino a la autonomía indígena*, pp. 44-47.

of this political party “exit” has continued to encroach on the autonomy process in JdM as the MAS has used its power and taken advantage of intercommunity disagreements to impede the AIOC process.

In April 2009, JdM was the first indigenous municipality to approach the Ministry of Autonomy to begin the process of AIOC construction. However, the process soon encountered local resistance and two groups of critics emerged. One was identified with the MAS, while the other were young people who perceived the AIOC as locking them out of power, similar to what occurred in Totorá. JdM only narrowly passed the initial referendum authorizing the writing of a statute. AIOC proponents attribute much of the opposition to the smear campaign that preceded the vote, and the substantial opposition among residents and young people. However, the most important obstacle to the successful creation of an AIOC in JdM is the political fragmentation existing within the municipality.

While the statute proposes a power sharing arrangement between the two *markas*, negotiations between the two have stalled as MACOAS insists the two *markas* share power equally as *markas*, which was a nonstarter for the leaders and residents of the much larger MACOJMA. Leaders of MACOJMA insist on implementing a leadership rotation among the five electoral districts created during negotiations before the 2004 elections. MACOAS opposes this rotation scheme because only one of the districts is located in their territory. While leaders from both sides indicated that they remain open to negotiation, coming to terms on a mutually satisfactory power sharing arrangement has not yet been achieved. Behind the

differences surrounding rotations in power sharing are disputes related to the allocation of public financing for economic development projects and services. As a result of this impasse, MACOAS authored its own statute in July 2015 and stated that if and when MACOJMA go forward with “its statute”, they would file a petition to form their own AIOC. While the statute associated with MACOJMA could by law be put to a referendum, the *cabildo* and the MACOJMA mayor, Fidel Ramirez, are thus far reluctant to do so, fearing that it would divide the *markas* further and also that it might not pass.³⁴

In addition to the disagreement over power sharing, the 2010 municipal elections seriously undermined the AIOC path to autonomy in JdM. For a variety of reasons, including the popularity of Evo and the MAS in 2010, the MAS candidate, Moisés Quizo, won the election for mayor with 62 percent of the vote. Quizo began his turn in office by at least rhetorically embracing the AIOC process.³⁵ However, by early 2011 it was clear that he and the MAS were working to stall the process, which he effectively did for the remainder of his term.³⁶ Some people I spoke with speculated that the driving force behind the mayor’s opposition to AIOC during his term was that it would force him from power. While this was certainly a factor, the position of the MAS to rhetorically support AIOC while failing to materially and

³⁴ Author interview with Fidel Ramírez Mamani, Jesús de Machaca, August 26, 2015.

³⁵ Albó, *Tres municipios andinos camino a la autonomía indígena*, pp. 74-77.

³⁶ John Cameron, “Bolivia’s Contentious Politics of ‘Normas y Procedimientos Propios’” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 8:2 (2013), p. 194.

practically assist in its implementation and achievement also played an important role.³⁷

While the elections of April 2015 represented somewhat of a reversal of fortunes with the MACOJMA candidate, Fidel Ramírez Mamani, winning the mayoral election and vowing to push ahead with AIOC, as of this writing the official process remains stalled. Nevertheless, I argue that the construction of indigenous autonomy has continued in JdM, independently from the official AIOC. During fieldwork in 2015 and 2016 I observed a strong working relationship between the new municipal government and the cabildo. Furthermore, it seems that a number of the articles in both the MACOJMA and MACOAS statutes are being observed and influencing public life in JdM, despite the fact that neither statute has been formally adopted.

Although field observations are insufficient to claim with certainty that the cabildo has been exerting its oversight functions (i.e. social control) over the municipal government, observations and interviews with cabildo members and public functionaries in the municipal government suggest that some oversight is occurring. A cabildo meeting I attended in August 2015 in a schoolhouse right off the central square demonstrated this. As community members filled the room, the mayor and the cabildo leaders sat on a small stage up front. First, the mayor offered a few proposals about local projects. These were discussed amongst those in attendance, with one

³⁷ Tockman and Cameron, "Indigenous Autonomy and the Contradictions of Plurinationalism in Bolivia," pp. 46-69; Jason Tockman, John Cameron, and Wilfredo Plata, "New Institutions of Indigenous Self-Governance in Bolivia: Between Autonomy and Self-Discipline," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 10:1 (2015), pp. 37-59.

being voted down. Next, the cabildo leaders put forward their proposals, with the mayor and a few municipal government staff asking questions and taking notes. All of this was taking place in Aymara, which I do not understand or speak and I was therefore relying on a man next to me to gain a general understanding. However, despite the fact that I could not understand the language, it was clear that the mayor and the cabildo were working together to decide the community's priorities and that the entire cabildo, not just the leaders, played an important role in this process. Francisco, the man next seated next to me, emphasized how different this type of interaction was from the previous MASista Quizo administration. A similar process would unfold a few months later in November 2015 when the municipal government worked closely with the community cabildo to hold a summit that focused on practical steps to realize *vivir bien* and sustainable development in Jesús de Machaca.³⁸

Like Totorá, JdM's efforts to construct an AIOC have not come to pass. While there is still support for AIOC, failure to successfully negotiate power and resource sharing remains the single most important obstacle, compounded by opposition from the MAS. During one of our car rides from La Paz to Jesús de Machaca, I asked Sataríno Tula, an AIOC community advocate and one of the coauthors of JdM's AIOC statute, how he viewed Morales and the MAS's role in relation to indigenous autonomy. He responded that "it would change the game" if Morales and the MAS were to actually support and promote state-sanctioned

³⁸ Thanks to Paul Haber for this comparison.

indigenous autonomy instead of attempting to impede the process.³⁹ Nevertheless, unlike Totorá, the process of asserting local autonomy and self-government via strengthening traditional indigenous practices alongside, if not in complete contrast to, liberal institutions has continued apace.

Charagua: In Pursuit of Living Well “Sin dueño”

In 2009, *Charagueños* passed a referendum with 56 percent of the vote to initiate the process of converting into an autonomous indigenous municipality. In 2015, Charagua passed a second referendum and became the first, and to date only, indigenous municipality in Bolivia to successfully fulfill all the requirements of the AIOC process – what Morell i Torra has aptly christened “the bureaucratic odyssey.”⁴⁰

According to 2012 census figures, Charagua’s population is an estimated 32,000, and at 74,000 square kilometers it is Bolivia’s largest municipality. The municipality itself is divided into six separate zones, four of which are rural (Charagua Norte, Parapitiguasu, Alto Isoso, and Bajo Isoso) and two that are considered urban (Charagua Pueblo and Charagua Estacion). It is also one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse municipalities in Bolivia with 67% of its population identifying as indigenous. By far the largest group in Charagua is the Guaraní (Ava-Guaraní in the northern foothills and Tupi-Guaraní in the south), but

³⁹ Author interview, Jesús de Machaca, July 28, 2015.

⁴⁰ Pere Morell i Torra, “La (Difícil) Construcción de Autonomías Indígenas en El Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. Consideraciones Generales y una Aproximación al Caso de Autonomía Guaraní Charagua Iyambae,” *REAF* 22 (2015), pp. 94-135.

there are also Quechua and Aymara speakers who have migrated east to the Chaco region from the western highlands. There is also a minority of whites/mestizos, known locally as *karai*, who until the late 20th century dominated the municipality's political power structure. Mennonites also make up a sizeable minority at 20% of the population. However, despite their rising economic power and impact on local markets, Mennonites remain politically isolated from the rest of the municipality as they choose not to vote and did not participate in the AIOC process.⁴¹

Autonomy from external control and the freedom to make decisions according to their own norms and procedures has been a foundational element of Guaraní culture according to scholars.⁴² Resistance in the name of autonomy was common during the colonial and republican periods until being silenced by the minority white population following the infamous massacre at Kuruyuki in 1892 in which the military intervened and more than 6,000 Guaraní (at that time known as Chiriguano) were killed. According to Combés, the massacre marked the end point of a long era of indigenous resistance and rebellion in the area. “Kuruyuki was the final real battle, the last armed struggle against the *karai*,” Combés claims.⁴³ However, by the 1960s and 1970s, the Guaraní again began to organize and contest *karai* hegemony and,

⁴¹ Mennonites contribute to public works and hire Guaraní workers but, despite the fact they chose not to participate in the autonomy process, the Mennonite population may end up being influenced by AIOC if some of the reforms advocated by their critics are taken seriously regarding land use and tenure practices and other challenges to their autonomy. For details of these critiques, see Francisco Pifarré, *Los guaraní chiriguano: Historia de un pueblo*, (La Paz: CIPCA, 1989). For more on the Mennonite population, see Adalberto Kopp, *Las colonias menonitas en Bolivia: Antecedentes, asentamientos y propuestas para un diálogo*, (La Paz: Fundación Tierra, 2015).

⁴² Thierry Saignes, *Historia del pueblo chiriguano*, (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2007); and, Pifarré, *Los guaraní chiriguano*.

⁴³ Isabelle Combés, “Las batallas de Kuruyuki: Variaciones sobre una derrota chiriguana,” *Bulletin de L’Institut français d’études andines*, 34:2 (2005), p. 224.

particularly with the founding in Charagua of the *Asamblea del Pueblo Guaraní* (APG) in February 1987, express demands for indigenous autonomy once again.

The APG is an organization that represents the interests of Bolivia's Guaraní nation, which is comprised of more than 360 communities in the departments of Santa Cruz, Chuquisaca, and Tarija.⁴⁴ (Anzaldo García and Gutiérrez Galean 2014: 91). Formally part of the *Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia* (Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia, CIDOB), the APG was created, according to one of its founding members, “with the objective of expanding and recuperating our territory and improving the life conditions of the Guaraní communities.... In this way, [the APG] was organized to make the *karais* respect [the Guaraní people].”⁴⁵ According to Ruben Ortiz, a contemporary APG leader from Charagua Norte, autonomy for the Guaraní people signifies self-governance combined with control over territory and economic resources.⁴⁶ The APG played a key role in the configuration of the four *capitanías* (indigenous zones) in Charagua (Charagua Norte, Alto Isoso, Bajo Isoso, and Charagua Sur, also known as Parapetiguasi) as *tierras comunitarias de origen* (TCO) in the 1990s, which would serve as the territorial foundation of indigenous autonomy.⁴⁷ In 2009, not long after the new constitution went into effect, the four

⁴⁴ Alejandra Anzaldo García and Magaly Gutiérrez Galean, “Avances y desafíos de la Autonomía Guaraní Charagua Iyambae,” *T'inkazos* 17:36 (2014), p. 91.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Xavier Albó, *El Chaco Guaraní Camino a la Autonomía Originaria: Charagua, Gutiérrez y Proyección Regional*, (La Paz: CIPCA, 2012), p. 66.

⁴⁶ Author interview, Charagua, September 6, 2016.

⁴⁷ With the 2009 constitution, TCOs were to be converted into TIOCs (*Territorios Indígena Originario Campesinos*). There was a struggle over the naming of the TCOs in the 1996 INRA legislation as indigenous territories or indigenous lands. Whereas indigenous groups put forward the name of “*Territorios Indígenas*,” the government of Sánchez de Lozada argued that the idea of indigenous territory put the Bolivian nation's territorial integrity at risk and instead introduced the TCO name. In

territorial *capitanías* that make up the APG in Charagua decided to move forward with an AIOC project and particularly the *capitanías* of Charagua Norte and Parapitiguasu have continued to lead the effort to the present day.

While the APG has been the central indigenous mechanism pushing for AIOC, both Plata and Albó emphasize the role played by the state and its functionaries and a number of NGOs in contributing a wide range of human and material resources to assist the process.⁴⁸ My fieldwork in 2015 and 2016 in Charagua, as well as in Jesús de Machaca and Totora Marka, corroborates the point highlighted by Tockman and Cameron that officials in the Ministry of Autonomies and the Vice-Ministry of Indigenous Autonomies have worked extremely hard in promoting AIOC and helping those municipalities through all the bureaucratic technical detail.⁴⁹ In general, the MAS has played an ambiguous role in the AIOC process in municipalities across the country, at times impeding the construction of indigenous autonomy while at others providing needed support. According to Tockman, the MAS's wavering support for AIOC is a consequence of its role as an elected government, its political economic orientation, and the correlation of social

relation to AIOC, Vadillo Pinto and Costas Monje argue that TCOs and TIOCAs as indivisible, communally-held property provide the material resources for indigenous community reproduction, while AIOC expands this power to include political control and administration. See, Alcides Vadillo Pinto and Patricia Costas Monje, "La autonomía indígena tiene su propio sello en Charagua," in *Reconfigurando territorios, reforma agraria, control territorial y gobiernos indígenas en Bolivia*, (La Paz: Fundación Tierra, 2010), p. 278.

⁴⁸ Wilfredo Plata, "Charagua: El autogobierno Guaraní Iyambae," in José Luis Exeni Rodríguez (ed.), *La larga marcha: El proceso de autonomías indígenas en Bolivia*, (La Paz: Fundación Rosa Luxemburg, 2015); and, Albó, *El Chaco Guaraní Camino a la Autonomía Originaria*.

⁴⁹ Jason Tockman and John Cameron, "Indigenous Autonomy and the Contradictions of Plurinationalism in Bolivia," *Latin American Politics and Society*, 56:3 (2014), pp. 56-57.

forces to which it responds.⁵⁰ In the case of Charagua, despite the fact that AIOC raises the specter of resistance to the state's reliance on the extraction of hydrocarbons in the region, the MAS has aligned with the APG in support of indigenous autonomy as a political tactic to counter the demands for departmental autonomy put forward by the rightist opposition centered in the city of Santa Cruz.⁵¹

In the NGO sphere, two of the most important organizations situated in Charagua Pueblo and helping the AIOC process forward have been the *Centro de Investigación y Promoción del Campesinado* (CIPCA) and the *Fundación Centro Arakuaarenda*. CIPCA is a nationally based organization with seven regional offices across Bolivia that was founded by three Jesuit priests – Xavier Albó, Luís Alegre, and Francisco Javier Santiago – in 1971. It has played a vital role in helping to define, articulate, and support indigenous and campesino communities, organizations, and their demands. The organization opened a regional office in Charagua in 1976 with the specific goals of contributing to the defense and consolidation of Guaraní territory, and helping to put an end to the relations of debt peonage between many Charagueño peasant families and local landowning elites.⁵²

The Centro Arakuaarenda, which translates as “the space/place of knowledge,” was originally a Jesuit institution and was formed to “accompany” the indigenous peoples of Charagua and help combat social inequality in the municipality between the indigenous and white/mestizo populations. Organized as a technical

⁵⁰ Jason Tockman, “Decentralisation, socio-territoriality and the exercise of indigenous self-governance in Bolivia,” *Third World Quarterly*, 37:1 (2016), p. 160.

⁵¹ Plata, “Charagua: El autogobierno Guaraní Iyambae,” p. 216.

⁵² Albó, *El Chaco Guaraní Camino a la Autonomía Originaria*, p. 60.

school, it has focused largely on issues of education, agricultural production, land tenure, and autonomy. Marcelo Alberto, the director of the Centro Arakuaarenda, pointed out that not only had many of the indigenous community leaders advocating for AIOC passed through the Centro's education programs but that the APG was officially created in a meeting at the center, demonstrating the formative nature of the institution and showing "how the vision of Guaraní autonomy comes from inside, not from the outside and above like other NGOs."⁵³ Both CIPCA and the Centro Arakuaarenda provided important technical support during the writing and revisions of the AIOC statute while also providing workshops, meetings, and "spaces of reflection" to debate issues related to AIOC and its implementation.

Inevitably, these linkages between the local community, the state and its functionaries, and NGOs have not come without tensions and liabilities. While Quisbert correctly argues "there can be no doubt that indigenous peoples need a central government that helps to produce the minimal conditions to create autonomous indigenous institutions," Tockman and Cameron argue that on a general level that the MAS-led state, apart from the Ministry of Autonomies, has not only failed to support indigenous autonomy but has also acted in some instances to undermine it.⁵⁴ This conflict was very much in evidence in a "next steps" planning meeting I attended in October 2015. Local people listened stone faced to recitations by state officials and NGO representatives who lectured them on the need to deeply

⁵³ Author interview, Charagua, September 9, 2016.

⁵⁴ Maximo Quisbert Q., "Hacia autonomías indígenas y sus riesgos latentes," *Willka*, 3:3 (2009), p. 133; and, Tockman and John Cameron, "Indigenous Autonomy and the Contradictions of Plurinationalism in Bolivia," p. 56.

familiarize themselves with the technical details of the statutes and only became animated when the discussion turned to community issues that they perceived to be important.

In conversations with various Ministry of Autonomy officials, they expressed real concern regarding the perceived failure of local people to not only take the statutes seriously but also to make progress on those aspects of the statutes that remain vague and in need of further elaboration. However, conversations with local Guaraní revealed a different set of concerns such as exerting more control over oil companies working within the municipality without losing access to the revenues they received from natural resource extraction. They were also interested in developing a system to ensure a better distribution of public spending within their communities. This tension between the focus of government *técnicos* on fulfilling the bureaucratic and legal procedures of the AIOC process and the desire of local community members to be in charge of the process and have it fulfill local needs has created obstacles in the construction of actual indigenous autonomy.

In addition, as AIOC represents a social struggle with multiple cultural, ideological, and material implications, there was also outright opposition to indigenous autonomy within the municipality.⁵⁵ The opposition was largely composed of the karai population living in Charagua Pueblo and organized in the *Verdes* party (*Verdad y Democracia Social*, or Truth and Social Democracy) and linked with the conservative *Comité Cívico de Charagua* (Civic Committee of

⁵⁵ See Plata, “Charagua: El autogobierno Guaraní Iyambae.”

Charagua), which was supported by then-governor of Santa Cruz, Rubén Costas, a well-known opponent of Morales and the MAS.

There was also opposition from a significant part of the Aymara and Quechua populations in Estación Charagua, who mostly live along the railway line. Making up roughly 7-10% of the municipal population, Aymara and Quechua speakers began to migrate into the area in significant numbers beginning in the 1950s through the 1970s, mainly from Chuquisaca and Potosí.⁵⁶ They established rural communities as part of a 1970s government sponsored agricultural development scheme, called the *Programa Abapó-Izozog*, which attempted to alleviate highland poverty and overcrowding by enticing peasants to migrate to the sparsely populated eastern lowlands. These migrants also formed urban communities in Charagua Pueblo and Estación. Though some of these urban dwellers have maintained small parcels of land and cattle, most are now involved in commerce and transportation.⁵⁷ In the 2009 referendum 61% of Charagua Estación residents voted against indigenous autonomy out of concern that AIOC would favor the Guaraní.⁵⁸

After the 2009 referendum, the *Asamblea Constituyente para el Estatuto AIOC* (AIOC Constituent Assembly) was formed to draft a statute outlining the institutional organization of AIOC and its relationship with the national state. While the Asamblea was initially organized in such a way as to provide representation for the various territorial areas that comprise Charagua, representatives for Charagua

⁵⁶ Albó, *El Chaco Guaraní Camino a la Autonomía Originaria*, p. 92.

⁵⁷ Albó, *El Chaco Guaraní Camino a la Autonomía Originaria*, pp. 74-75.

⁵⁸ Albó, *El Chaco Guaraní Camino a la Autonomía Originaria*, p. 126.

Pueblo did not participate, while those from Estación Charagua did so only intermittently. René Gómez, president of the Constituent Assembly, argues that the karai opted not to participate because they did not want to confer legitimacy on a new order that they no longer dominated.⁵⁹ The absence of representatives from Charagua Pueblo, combined with the only partial representation of Aymara and Quechua populations and the self-exclusion of the Mennonites, meant “the composition of the Assembly did not reflect the diversity of social actors” in the municipality.⁶⁰ However, the absence of these local social forces in the writing of the statute and their continuous opposition to AIOC was insufficient to stop it as together they represent only a minority of the population.

Plata concludes that the two main arguments against AIOC were that it would “take away the right of the citizenry to a universal vote” and that it “would break the unity, harmony and social peace” which Charagua had enjoyed for over a hundred years.⁶¹ This characterization of the last 100 years is of course contrary to the dominant understanding of this history amongst the Guaraní, who feel that their interests and values had been rendered mute by the impositions of outsiders. Another argument, put forward by larger landholders, was a concern that AIOC would lead to the expropriation of private lands. However, AIOC advocates have sought to assure landowners that this would not occur and the statute states that there will be respect for both communal and individual land holdings.

⁵⁹ Author interview, Charagua, October 15, 2015.

⁶⁰ Plata, “Charagua: El autogobierno Guaraní Iyambae,” p. 212.

⁶¹ Plata, “Charagua: El autogobierno Guaraní Iyambae,” p. 210.

Informal conversations amongst *karai* middle class professionals and business owners often revealed the concern that indigenous autonomy would be undermined by the lack of public policy experience amongst those who aspire to assume power within the new AIOC government. One such conversation took place by chance with an employee of International Save the Children. He expressed skepticism regarding the use of funds administered to date by the *capitanías* along with unsubstantiated accusations of incompetence, corruption, and nepotism but either could not or would not substantiate his claims with specific examples.⁶² Nevertheless, according to Ambrosio Choquindi, the *capitán grande* (head authority) of Alto Isoso, despite the inability of the opposition to present a persuasive alternative project, it was really the unity of the Guaraní populations under the leadership of the APG that was the deciding factor that allowed AIOC to become a reality.⁶³

Despite the difficulties and social conflicts involved in the process, the AIOC statute was approved in the final referendum in Charagua on September 20, 2015 with a vote of 53%, with an official date of AIOC transition of January 8, 2017. The organization of power under AIOC seeks to fundamentally transform the institutional structure of the state and is based on the territorial organization of the municipality. The four *capitanías* correspond to the three *Territorios Indígena Originario Campesinos* (TIOC): Isoso, which is divided into two *capitanías*, *alto* and *bajo* (1,705,000 acres), Charagua Norte (239,800 acres), and Parapitiguasu (286,000 acres). The institutionalization of AIOC is heavily influenced by the indigenous

⁶² Author interview, Charagua, October 17, 2015.

⁶³ Author interview, Charagua, September 6, 2016.

capitanías' model of decision-making, which is articulated on three levels: the communal (families), the zonal, which refers to the individual *capitanías*, and the inter-zonal, which coordinates the four *capitanías*.

According to Magaly Gutiérrez, the principal innovation of the new institutional system of self-government is the creation of the *Ñemboati Reta*, or the communal mechanism of collective decision-making.⁶⁴ There will be 27 members of the *Ñemboati Reta*, two representatives (one man and one woman) from each of the six zones and one representative from each of the three national parks located within the municipality. Unlike in other places like the United States and Canada, the Kaaiya del Gran Chaco, Otuquis and Ñembi Guasu national parks are inhabited territory and are therefore accorded representation under Charagua's AIOC statute. Each one of the zones is free to elect members according to their own norms and procedures, which means that leaders in the *capitanías* and park areas will be chosen through their own *usos y costumbres*, while the secret ballot will be used in the two urban zones. The *Ñemboati Reta*, which is defined in Article 19 of the statute as “the maximum instance of decision-making of the *Gobierno Autónomo Guaraní Charagua Iyambae*” that the rest of the government is “obligated to observe,” is explicitly designed to be a deliberative body, meaning it is to be a space where debate occurs, and decisions are made rather than a body that ratifies decisions made previously by an external municipal government leadership.

⁶⁴ Author interview, Charagua, September 9, 2016.

What makes Charagua's AIOC institutional set-up different from other indigenous communities, in the Altiplano for example, is that there is no ultimate authority in the form of a rotating *mallku* or *cazique* (indigenous community leaders), or even a rotation of power between different *markas* (unit of indigenous socio-territorial organization). The AIOC statute replaces the accumulation of power in one person (for instance, a mayor) with a decentralization of power that attempts to represent the diversity of the municipality. Article 47 of the statute stipulates that the executive function, the *Tëtarembiokuai Reta*, will be decentralized to the six districts with a coordinator and that this position will be rotated between the six zones. But, as Magaly Gutiérrez, a longtime CIPCA administrator and current Ministry of Autonomies official, pointed out, the *Tëtarembiokuai Reta* does not have actual decision-making power. As an executive body, it can only ratify and implement decisions that have already been made by the deliberative *Ñemboati Reta* mechanism.⁶⁵

As is true of other AIOC statutes, how the indigenous justice system in Charagua will function according to local norms and procedures is unclear as these statute articles are extremely brief and lack much detail. Plata speculates that at least part of the reason for the brevity is that the process is so complex and diverse within the municipality that it would have taken too much space to articulate in the statute. Furthermore, he argues that indigenous justice is articulated in oral form rather than

⁶⁵ Author interview, September 9, 2016.

in written script.⁶⁶ However, according to René Gómez, president of the *Asamblea Autonómica de Charagua*, the ways in which indigenous forms of justice and *justicia ordinaria* (ordinary, state justice) would interact and overlap was not clear and, so as to not undermine the legitimacy and inclusiveness of AIOC, the sections of the document were left vague in order to avoid the impression that indigenous norms of justice would be applied in ways that could offend non-Guaraní members of the community. In particular, he argued that despite the fears of some Charagueños that Guaraní law would be imposed upon them, this would not in fact be the case.⁶⁷

Within the four Guaraní *capitanías* it is to be anticipated that the determination of guilt and sanction will follow local customs in terms of organization (an assembly will determine if the infraction is too complicated to be settled by the secretary of justice in the community). Francisco Arrendondo, a *comunero* from Capigwazwti, explained that, in most cases, infractions will be dealt with locally, but in cases where the infraction is grave, they will pass the case over to the state system (*justicia ordinaria*). According to Arrendondo, indigenous justice seeks to be restorative, to the victim of the crime, to the perpetrator, and to the community in general.⁶⁸ This contrasts sharply with *justicia ordinaria*, which is seen by many indigenous people with whom I spoke to be problematic due to its punitive nature. As is true in so much of AIOC, the relationship between indigenous forms of justice

⁶⁶ Plata, "Charagua: El autogobierno Guaraní Iyambae," p. 229, 235 and author interview, La Paz, September 30, 2015.

⁶⁷ Author interview, Charagua, October 15, 2015.

⁶⁸ Author interview, Charagua, October 16, 2015.

and *justicia ordinaria* will only become clear through the actual implementation of each as AIOC becomes a reality.

Finally, there are major hydrocarbon deposits that are currently being exploited by private companies under contract with the MAS government throughout Charagua. Since 2006, municipalities receive a quarter of the Direct Hydrocarbons Tax, distributed preferentially to hydrocarbons producing areas such as Charagua, which has significantly increased revenue for the municipal government.⁶⁹ However, in the eyes of some Charagueños, while the extraction of hydrocarbons results in increased material wealth, it comes at the expense of environmental damage and the loss of control over local decision-making, given the fact that decisions on natural gas extraction have been made without respecting the constitutional right of prior and informed consultation, not to mention the more rigorous international norm of prior and informed consent. Differences of opinion regarding how the AIOC will deal with this question have created divisions within and between the various populations in Charagua. How hard the newly formed AIOC presses for changes in its relationship with the petroleum companies and the MAS government over the structure of hydrocarbons extraction will undoubtedly be an important part of how indigenous autonomy unfolds in Charagua.

The Ambiguities of AIOC

⁶⁹ Thanks to Linda Farthing for this insight.

Miguel González notes that Bolivia has the “most advanced and comprehensive conceptualization of territorial autonomies in Latin America.”⁷⁰ However, González also points out that “despite the innovative legislation, and partly due to the restrictions imposed under the constitutional provisions through secondary/enabling legislation, the actual operation of autonomies...has been an uphill and a winding terrain.”⁷¹ From a similar position, Tockman, Cameron, and Plata argue that the future of indigenous autonomy has been substantially limited by language adopted in statutes that determine the institutional and legal framework for the AIOCs.⁷² They reason that state functionaries influenced the adoption of statutes that have made it difficult, if not impossible, to meaningfully depart from the municipal model put in place during the 1990s decentralization program. Most importantly, they argue that the statutes undermine the ability of local indigenous communities to exert robust territorial control and free, prior, and informed consent as called for by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization.

While acknowledging the importance of the statutes it is worth mentioning that the shape of AIOC institutions are very much still in the making and therefore remain potentially transformative. However, in what ways might AIOC operate to make indigenous community practices more legible to the state, thus making those

⁷⁰ Miguel González, “Indigenous Territorial Autonomy in Latin America: An Overview,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 10:1 (2015), p. 17.

⁷¹ González, “Indigenous Territorial Autonomy in Latin America,” p. 19.

⁷² Jason Tockman, John Cameron, and Wilfredo Plata, “New Institutions of Indigenous Self-Governance in Bolivia: Between Autonomy and Self-Discipline,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 10:1 (2015), pp. 37-59.

communities more manageable for the rationalities of government? In other words, how might state sanctioned and administered processes of constructing indigenous autonomy transform and “domesticate” indigenous demands for self governance “into a state reform that deepens the mechanisms of indigenous participation in the state but does so through their subordination, without changing the structures of the state itself?”⁷³ These questions are particularly important in Bolivia given the expansion of urban union structures into the countryside after the 1952 revolution and the multicultural reforms of the 1990s.⁷⁴ While each of these processes attempted to transform the state and open up avenues for increased democratic participation in politics by previously excluded groups, at the same time they both sought to control that participation through liberal mechanisms.

After the 1952 revolution the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR) sought to turn indigenous people into peasants largely through the 1953 Agrarian Reform, the creation of the Ministry of Peasant Affairs, and organizing communities into rural unions (*sindicatos*). In many areas, especially where large agricultural estates (*haciendas*) had not existed and/or had failed to stamp out

⁷³ Fernando Garcés, “The Domestication of Indigenous Autonomies in Bolivia: From the Pact of Unity to the New Constitution,” in Nicole Fabricant and Bret Gustafson (eds.), *Remapping Bolivia: Resources, Territory, and Indigeneity in a Plurinational State*, (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2011), p. 164.

⁷⁴ On the expansion of union structures, see Xavier Albó, “From MNRistas to Kataristas to Katari,” in Steve J. Stern (ed.), *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World: 18th to 20th Centuries*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 379-419; James Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins: Political Struggle in Bolivia, 1952-1982*, (New York: Verso, 1984); Javier Hurtado, *El Katarismo*, (La Paz: Biblioteca del Bicentenario de Bolivia, 2016 [1986]); Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but not Defeated: Peasant Struggles among the Aymara and Quechua in Bolivia, 1900-1980*, (Geneva: UNRISD, 1987). For analysis of the 1990s neoliberal reforms, see Benjamin Kohl and Linda Farthing, *Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Hegemony and Popular Resistance*, (New York: Zed Books, 2006).

traditional communal organizations, such as in the North of Potosi, the *sindicatos* were basically grafted on top of existing indigenous social structures.⁷⁵ In others, such as parts of La Paz and the valleys of Cochabamba where the expansion of haciendas had resulted in the increased decomposition of traditional communal organization, the union structures took hold more easily. Rural peoples had organized in the highlands and valleys well before the MNR triumph in 1952, as Laura Gotkowitz describes, and played an important role in bringing about the 1952 revolution. They were, according to Gotkowitz, “the revolution before the revolution.”⁷⁶ But, she also notes that, despite the pre-1952 configuration of rural *sindicatos*, after the revolution “the MNR and other outside organizers played a fundamental part in the formation of rural unions and militias: the party’s agents were sent virtually everywhere after 1952.”⁷⁷ MNR involvement in their expansion served to arrange communities in a top-down, corporatist fashion.

In the eastern part of the country, the Agrarian Reform failed to fundamentally alter the social relations of production but rather deepened the inequality in land distribution and agriculture that remained essentially semi-feudal. While it is commonly thought that the 1953 reform was not applied in the east, a number of scholars have shown how the reform had important impacts despite the fact it was implemented in a different fashion. Urioste and Kay (2005), for example,

⁷⁵ Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “Liberal Democracy and Ayllu Democracy in Bolivia: The Case of Northern Potosí,” *Journal of Development Studies* 26:4 (1990), pp. 97-121; and, Tristan Platt, *Estado Boliviano y Ayllu Andino: Tierra y tributo en el Norte de Potosí*, (La Paz: Biblioteca del Bicentenario de Bolivia, 2016 [1982]).

⁷⁶ Laura Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia, 1880-1952*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 5.

⁷⁷ Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for Our Rights*, pp. 274-275.

demonstrate how the agrarian reform promoted a new structure of large estates (*latifundio*) and created a new rural elite sector in the eastern lowlands.⁷⁸ Valdivia argues that the reform in the east laid the foundation for the development of agro-industrial capitalism from the 1970s to the present.⁷⁹

Attempting to develop the country's agriculture production, the MNR state tried to fundamentally alter the countryside and "modernize" it by transforming the existing systems of land tenure and relations of production. They also sought to incorporate the indigenous peasantry into the relations of the state but in a manner that made rural communities legible to the MNR-led state. Thus, instead of maintaining the extensive and varied systems of *ayllus* and *markas* and their communally-owned forms of land tenure and modes of production that had structured the Andean countryside prior to the hacienda system, the MNR wanted to reorganize these communities in a hierarchical and corporatist structure of rural *sindicatos* that were similar across various communities. While the unions certainly addressed the grievances of the rural populations under hacienda domination, they were also an expression of the cultural hegemony of the mestizo elite and were conceived as a means of transforming and overcoming the indigenous society's forms of social organization.⁸⁰ This reorganization made it easier for the state to interact with the

⁷⁸ Miguel Urioste and Cristóbal Kay, *Latifundios, avasallamientos y autonomías: La reforma agraria inconclusa en el Oriente*, (La Paz: Fundación Tierra, 2005).

⁷⁹ Gabriela Valdivia, "Agrarian Capitalism and Struggles over Hegemony in the Bolivian Lowlands," *Latin American Perspectives* 37:4 (2010), pp. 67-87.

⁸⁰ Rivera Cusicanqui, "Liberal Democracy and Ayllu Democracy in Bolivia," pp. 105, 111.

communities and to successfully implement the agrarian reform, but, at the same time, it increased the state's ability to direct and govern from above.

Similarly, the multicultural reforms of the 1990s in Bolivia, like elsewhere in Latin America, were an attempt to appease indigenous peoples' demands for recognition of their territorial and cultural rights, importantly leaving issues of economic redistribution to the side. The 1993 *Plan de Todos* was a package of constitutional reforms that recognized the multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural character of Bolivian society and codified certain rights of indigenous peoples. But, the implementation of the reforms was both contradictory in nature and limited in practice. For instance, while the 1996 *Ley Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria* (Law of the National Agrarian Reform Institute, INRA) laid out certain restrictions in order to protect indigenous territories, it also sought to create an "efficient" land market through increased titling and land tax reform. Thus, while the INRA law opened the path for indigenous communities to apply for communally owned landholdings (TCOs), there were a number of issues that limited the process in practice. On the one hand, the process of delimitation and titling was complex, costly, bureaucratic and proceeded extremely slowly. During the first 10 years of the reform process between 1996 and 2006, for example, only 11.7% of the land subject to the reform process (106,751,722 hectares) was actually titled, 14.9% of areas were in process, and 73.3% of the land was not even surveyed.⁸¹ On the other hand, TCOs were only comprised of the land itself, leaving the rights to subsoil resources outside

⁸¹ Gonzalo Colque, Efrain Tinta, and Esteban Sanjinés, *Segunda Reforma Agraria: Una historia que incomoda*, (La Paz: Fundación Tierra, 2016), p. 154.

indigenous control, which had important implications for mining concessions and oil exploration.⁸² Overall, according to Kohl and Farthing, INRA “shifted the balance from privileging the social value of land... to privileging the importance of individual property rights mediated through the market.”⁸³

The point of examining these two instances is not to claim that some “traditional,” untouched sphere of indigenous relations external to the rest of Bolivian society was opened up and comprised by a “modern,” universalizing state attempting to implement a new capitalist market logic. Rather, the point is to highlight how reforms that, at least theoretically, present the possibility of radical social transformation may in fact also function to extend the rationalities of government.

Is an analogous process occurring in the case of AIOC in plurinational Bolivia? Is it fruitful to think about the construction of AIOCs as at least potentially one element of what Mouffe has termed “hegemony through neutralization” and defined as “a situation where demands which challenge the hegemonic order are recuperated by the existing system by satisfying them in a way that neutralizes their subversive potential.”⁸⁴ The process of rural unionization by the MNR, the multicultural reforms of the 1990s, and constructing indigenous autonomy under the MAS are certainly different projects. An important difference is that the attempt to reorganize the countryside under the MNR after 1952 and the implementation of

⁸² Willem Assies, “Land tenure legislation in a pluri-cultural and multi-ethnic Society: The case of Bolivia,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 33:4 (2006), p. 595.

⁸³ Kohl and Farthing, *Impasse in Bolivia*, p. 93.

⁸⁴ Chantal Mouffe, 2008 “Critique as Counter-Hegemonic Intervention.” *Transversal*, 2008, accessed at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0808/mouffe/en>.

neoliberal multicultural reforms during the 1990s were both largely top-down processes in response to indigenous and campesino agitation, whereas the demand for indigenous autonomy is a historic demand emanating upwards from the grassroots of indigenous communities. This distinction, although expressed in mechanical and rigid form, is nevertheless important, as Zavaleta Mercado notes: “It is one thing when [people] themselves break the feudal yoke through their own collective impulse and quite another when they are let go through a vertical act, that is to say, by something that does not come from themselves. Exogenetic freedom produces only formal freedom.”⁸⁵

Scholars have observed how the process of writing the autonomy statutes in the eleven municipalities pursuing AIOC across Bolivia relied heavily on the technical capabilities and know-how of government bureaucrats, lawyers, and consultants, which had significant impacts on the deliberations and content of the autonomy statutes themselves.⁸⁶ This reliance on *tecnicos*, in addition to the overarching legal framework structuring the autonomy process, may well dull the transformative potentials of indigenous autonomy and predispose AIOCs to function as little more than modestly reformed municipalities, or *municipios con poncho* (normal municipalities only now with an indigenous face) as some autonomy advocates who remain critical of the AIOC process say in the Altiplano. We therefore need to be cognizant of the ways in which ostensible processes of state

⁸⁵ Quoted in Garcés, “The Domestication of Indigenous Autonomies in Bolivia,” p. 46.

⁸⁶ See, Tockman and John Cameron, “Indigenous Autonomy and the Contradictions of Plurinationalism in Bolivia,”; and Tockman, Cameron, and Plata, “New Institutions of Indigenous Self-Governance in Bolivia.”

transformation and decolonization that envision promoting indigenous decision-making power at the local level might produce unexpected consequences that ultimately expand the reach and power of the state by making autonomous indigenous communities more susceptible to the “rationalities of government.” Perhaps, as Hale (2011:189) has argued in relation to Central America, indigenous autonomy as a path towards radical social and political change in Bolivia is increasingly becoming entangled in the very structures of dominance it was originally attempting to resist.⁸⁷

Concluding remarks

This chapter has outlined both the possibilities and the ambiguities of constructing officially sanctioned indigenous autonomies in contemporary Bolivia. I have argued that indigenous autonomy is an essential aspect of any plurinational project and that without the creation of territories under indigenous control the robust realization of plurinationality and a plurinational state will remain unrealized horizons. The construction of indigenous autonomy opens up the possibilities for a radical transformation of the Bolivian state and society, which was a driving factor in the 2000-2005 period of social upheaval that brought Evo Morales and the MAS to power. As the only municipality to officially become an AIOC, Charagua is in the process of creating new material, ideological, and institutional structures that have the possibility of transforming the historical social and political relations of exploitation

⁸⁷ Charles Hale, “Resistencia para qué? Territory, autonomy and neoliberal entanglements in the ‘empty spaces’ of Central America,” *Economy and Society*, 40:2 (2011), p. 189.

and exclusion that have maintained the indigenous majority population in a subaltern position. As such, these are important processes for decolonizing Bolivia and implementing plurinationality. However, we also need to understand that indigenous autonomy is not (and cannot form a space) outside of the state. Rather, AIOC is intricately bound up with a relational view of the state as an important site of an ongoing struggle of social forces with differing visions of the relationship between the state apparatus and society. A relational view of the state helps us understand the seemingly contradictory outcomes of achieving indigenous autonomy in Charagua, while at the same time possibly leading to the further incorporation of autonomous indigenous municipalities into the regulatory state apparatus.

If Bolivia is to institutionalize a new state form and actualize the idea of plurinationality, meaningful expressions of indigenous autonomy are an indispensable feature in this process. To date, out of the country's 337 municipalities and of the original twelve localities to embark on the AIOC process, only Charagua has become an official autonomous indigenous municipality. What, then, does this tell us about the conflict between hegemonic and plurinational visions of social change in contemporary Bolivia? To be sure, indigenous autonomy is still an open question and how it operates and relates to the national state can only be determined in the process of its construction. However, we can see that there is a disjuncture between the rhetoric of plurinationality articulated by the MAS government and outlined in the Bolivian constitution and its actual implementation and practice on the ground. What we see is closer to a reconfiguration of the existing state apparatus under a new

hegemonic social bloc rather than its fundamental transformation through a radical dispersion of power. While I am not arguing that there is a direct correspondence between the MAS struggle for hegemony on a national scale and the failure thus far of AIOC at the local level (i.e. there are other intervening factors), I have argued that the hegemonic project of the MAS challenges the idea and practice of plurinationality, an essential facet of which is indigenous autonomy. Seen from this angle, a new MAS-led hegemony comes at the expense of plurinational indigenous autonomy, which represents a missed opportunity to fundamentally transform the Bolivian state.

Conclusion

Bolivia's 2000-2005 insurrections paved the way for Evo Morales and the MAS to take state power in 2006 with a mandate to fundamentally transform the nation's social, economic, and political structures. Scholars and activists have argued that this period represents Bolivia's most recent social revolutionary moment.¹ While this period certainly opened up possibilities for revolutionary change, this dissertation has tried to analyze not necessarily the scope of change but rather the differing ideas of what revolutionary transformation actually is, and how those different visions come into conflict and play out in real, concrete circumstances.

I have argued that the central axis along which many of the fundamentally divisive conflicts rest in contemporary Bolivia during the *proceso de cambio* can be theorized as an antagonism between two differing visions of revolutionary change, conceptualized in terms of a struggle for hegemony on the one hand, and as a demand for plurinationality on the other. Hegemony as a practice of social transformation entails the replacement of an existing social and state order by a new hegemonic social bloc articulating its particular interests as universal interests. Plurinationality envisions a different process of change whereby the idea of any hegemonic group implementing its particular vision of development through control of the state apparatus is brought into question and replaced by a multiplicity of interrelated yet

¹ See, James Dunkerley, "Evo Morales, the 'Two Bolivias' and the Third Bolivian Revolution," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 39 (1), 2007, pp. 133-166; Adolfo Gilly, "Bolivia: A 21st century revolution," *Socialism and Democracy*, 19:3 (2005), pp. 41-54; and Forrest Hylton and Sinclair Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons: Past and Present in Bolivian Politics*, (New York: Verso, 2007).

distinct territories of difference, where processes of development and political authority are determined on a local and communal basis.

I have demonstrated how these contrasting theoretical visions encounter one another in practice through an investigation of three recent moments of conflict: the 2011 TIPNIS controversy, the 2013/2014 government intervention in CONAMAQ, and the ongoing attempts to construct autonomous indigenous territories. Through these three moments, we can see how Morales and the MAS have sought to implement and guide their “democratic and cultural revolution” based on a vision of hegemonic social change that differs significantly with the ideas and practices of plurinationality that many former MAS supporters have tried to put into action. Recognizing these contrasting visions of revolutionary change helps us not only understand many of the most important conflicts in Bolivia today, but also raises bigger questions surrounding the idea of revolution and social change itself.

What exactly *is* a revolution? For Charles Tilly, a revolution is a multi-stage process that ultimately ends with “a forcible transfer of power over a state.”² However, the revolutionary process begins during a period of “multiple sovereignty” where at least two groups contend for state power. A successful revolution for Tilly is composed of at least three distinct elements: 1) two or more power blocs with significant popular support, 2) incompatible claims on state power, and 3) the transfer of state power from the incumbents to the challengers. One of the most influential definitions comes from Theda Skocpol who argues revolutions “are rapid, basic

² Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492-1992*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), p. 8.

transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below."³ Gramsci's theory of revolution is a bit more complex than either Tilly or Skocpol as he incorporates the transformation of the ideational structures or worldviews of societies, in addition to the economic and political structures. As explained in chapter 2, these revolutionary transformations occur through protracted wars of position and, ultimately, a war of movement. In other words, revolutions according to Gramsci are drawn out struggles for hegemony that at a certain point in time involve a direct confrontation over state power.

Yet, all of these conceptualizations of revolution are based on the assumption that the terrain of struggle is the modern nation state form, which presupposes that some coherently unified nation (despite its actual heterogenous composition) corresponds directly with a unified governing state. I highlight this not to argue for the inability of this notion to help us understand historical processes of revolution or its failure to provide the "correct" path toward liberation (although critiques of the strategic kind are certainly possible). Rather, I raise this in order to question the meaning of revolution today with an aim toward rethinking the centrality of the nation state form in processes of radical social transformation. Decentering the nation state allows us to imagine alternative forms of social and political organization and helps us understand why Morales and the MAS have encountered so much resistance to their attempts at revolutionary change.

³ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 4.

I am not arguing that Morales and the MAS have simply maintained the status quo or merely implemented a form of “reconstituted neoliberalism,” as some have maintained.⁴ While critics are correct to point out the failures of the MAS to fundamentally transform the class structure of society and to challenge the country’s essentially dependent position within the global capitalist economy, the Morales government has indeed played an important role in pushing through a number of important changes over the past decade that have improved the social, economic, and political conditions of Bolivia’s largely indigenous poor majority.⁵ What I have tried to do in this dissertation is to highlight the contending visions of revolutionary social change and state transformation in Bolivia today as a way to understand many of the contemporary conflicts in that country, and to offer possible alternative visions of how we might structure our social, economic, and political lives.

⁴ See Jeffery Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia: Class Struggle, Indigenous Liberation, and the Politics of Evo Morales*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011).

⁵ Linda Farthing and Benjamin Kohl, *Evo’s Bolivia: Continuity and Change*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

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