

THE STRUGGLE TO CREATE A RADICAL DEMOCRACY IN BOLIVIA

Nancy Postero

University of California, San Diego

Abstract: Evo Morales's Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) government is often held up as the leading edge of the so-called left turn in Latin America. Yet this article argues that there is profound tension in the MAS administration: a push for social justice to overcome both colonialism and neoliberalism, on the one hand, and the embrace of liberal political institutions (e.g., elections, constitutional conventions, direct public referenda) to do so, on the other hand. Taking a close look at some of the conflicts that the Morales administration has produced as it tries to balance these two frameworks may help us recognize some underlying tensions in both the actually existing democracy and liberalism itself. I suggest that as Morales and his government push this agenda forward, they not only are trying to move beyond neoliberalism but also may be working toward perfecting, or vernacularizing, liberalism to make it more democratic and more relevant to Bolivia's indigenous populations. So, instead of post-neoliberalism, perhaps we are seeing efforts to transform liberalism through interactions with indigenous cultures and demands, with a goal to deepen democracy.

INTRODUCTION

In April 2008, the Bolivian president Evo Morales was invited to address the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Affairs at the United Nations in New York. Addressing a group of nearly three thousand delegates on the first anniversary of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, Morales made a provocative recommendation. He said that the international community should "eradicate capitalism" and substitute it with "communitarian socialism" if it hoped to save the planet from dangers like climate change (*El Deber* 2008a). He blamed the capitalist system for fomenting industrialization and consumption based on profit and the exploitation of natural resources. He ended by offering a new set of Ten

I thank Philip Oxhorn, Elana Zilberg, Roger Rouse, Enrique Herrera, and the two external reviewers of this volume for their helpful suggestions in the formulation of this chapter. This chapter is based on a paper I presented at the joint meeting of the American Ethnology Society and the *Canadian Association for Social and Cultural Anthropology* in Toronto in May 2007, for a panel organized by Julia Paley. A revised version formed the basis of a colloquium talk at the University of California, Riverside, in April 2009. The comments I received at both events were instrumental to this article's current form. I also thank Mark Goodale for our ongoing and fruitful discussions about liberalism and Bolivia.

Latin American Research Review, Special Issue © 2010 by the Latin American Studies Association.

Commandments for the future of the earth, inspired by Andean indigenous values. They include renouncing war, imperialism, and colonialism; considering water, energy, and education as human rights not subject to private business interests; and constructing a communitarian socialism in harmony with Mother Earth (*El Deber* 2008a).

Morales's indigenous-socialist discourse is not surprising given his trajectory. He came to power as the head of the *cocaleros'* (coca growers') union, asserting the right of Andean peoples to grow the sacred leaf of the Inca in the face of the U.S. war on drugs. Over the past decade, he has worked with social movements of poor and indigenous Bolivians to build a political movement that could enact the agendas of his revolutionary ancestors, Túpac Katari, Túpac Amaru, and Zárate Willka, enabling Bolivia's native and poor peoples' claims to land and dignity (Albro 2005, 2006; Hylton and Thomson 2007; Postero 2007a, 2007b). Thus, one of the fundamental themes of his administration is to decolonize Bolivia, thereby ridding the country of its legacy of racism.

Another fundamental theme is to roll back the ravages of the neoliberal years, thus enabling a new post-neoliberal state. David Harvey (2005, 2) suggests that "neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within a institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade."¹ This philosophy was put into practice in the mid-1980s by the so-called Washington Consensus and was diffused throughout Latin America in the form of structural adjustment programs, conditions on loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Bolivia enacted all the classic political and economic reforms, including privatizing state enterprises like the mines, which resulted in the forced retirement of thousands; opening the country to foreign capital, especially in the hydrocarbon arena; cutting social services; and cutting tariffs, which made Bolivian farmers' products less viable as the market flooded with cheap imports (Arze and Kruse 2004; Kohl and Farthing 2006; Postero 2007b). Morales campaigned for years against neoliberal economic policies, which he claimed enriched a small transnational elite but impoverished the indigenous majority. This view gained force after 2000, when popular protests against neoliberal economic policies rocked the country. In 2000, when the local government privatized

1. Neoliberalism is a complex concept to which I cannot do justice here. It is a philosophy, a discourse, and a set of real-life practices enacted in particular ways in different conjunctures of history and space. Its political and economic reforms are accompanied by and reinforced by forms of governance and subject making, all of which are engaged with, negotiated, reworked, and resisted. For an in-depth consideration of the interrelations between neoliberalism and multiculturalism in Bolivia, see Postero 2007a. For excellent overviews of neoliberalism, see Hart 2002a, 2002b, and 2010.

the public water company in Cochabamba, residents, farmer-irrigators, students, and factory workers united in urban street protests dubbed the "Water War." The demonstrations forced Bechtel, the main corporation holding the concession, to give up the contract. In its place, a reconstituted public waterworks system, with a popular advisory board, resumed control of services. This was followed in October 2003 by the Gas War, when indigenous residents of El Alto, the satellite city above La Paz, mounted massive demonstrations after the neoliberal president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada unveiled plans to give concessions to transnational corporations to pipe natural gas from the eastern lowlands to Chilean ports for export to the United States. After six weeks of marches and numerous civilian deaths at the hands of the military, President Sánchez de Lozada resigned. His successor lasted less than a year, thus paving the way for new elections in 2005. Morales seized the opportunity, running for president on a populist anti-neoliberalism platform. He explained the 2003 uprising as a sign of "the exhaustion of neoliberalism" (Morales 2003) and promised to nationalize gas resources, restore Bolivia's sovereignty (long eroded by its dependence on foreign and U.S. aid), and institute national development based on indigenous values and social justice for the poor (Postero 2007b).

As a result, Morales has a reputation, along with Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, as a rabble-rousing socialist who is leading the continent to the left. But Morales is also clearly characterizing his administration in liberal democratic terms. In the past decades, the *cochaberros* and other indigenous groups traded in the Marxist-based ideologies of class warfare that motivated 1970s movements for social change for a decidedly liberal framework tied to international discourses of both human rights and indigenous rights. Social movements across the continent turned to the framework of citizenship and rights to seek recognition and resources from the state (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998; Postero and Zamosc 2004; Speed 2008). This was made possible by a convergence of two important trends, what Brazilian scholar Evelina Dagnino (2003, 7) has termed a "perverse confluence." On the one hand, she suggests that social movements and civil society empowered by the return to democracy demanded more meaningful participation in society. On the other hand, neoliberal governance passed on many of the responsibilities of governing from the state to "responsible" neoliberal citizens. Peck and Tickell (2002, 384) have described the resulting neoliberal mode of governance as a "shift from the pattern of deregulation and dismantlement so dominant in the 1980s, which might be characterized as 'roll-back neoliberalism,' to an emergent phase of active state building and regulatory reform—an ascendant moment of 'roll-out neoliberalism.'" A central strategy of this form of governance has been to pair economic reforms with a discourse of market democracy, to link free trade and the promotion of democracy. This has resulted in policies such

as decentralization, the devolution of state power to cities and regions, and the empowerment of civil society.

In the Bolivian case, as I have previously argued (Postero 2007b), in the mid-1990s, the neoliberal government instituted such a set of political reforms aimed to end what it considered an inefficient and conflictive corporatist form of civil society. Through the medium of neoliberal multiculturalism, it offered a new form of citizenship based on a decentralized system of popular participation in municipal development decision making. The failure of these political reforms to overturn the underlying racism of the country—and the terrible social costs of the accompanying neoliberal economic restructuring—frustrated many indigenous and poor people, but they did take on the idea that liberal institutions could be transformed to meet their interests. One response was the formation of the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement toward Socialism, MAS) Party, which, after the 2003 Gas War, brought Morales to power.

Since his election in 2005, Morales and the MAS Party have used liberal electoral politics to push forward a two-pronged agenda. First, through executive decrees and laws passed by the MAS-controlled Congress, they have substantially reworked the relation between the state and market, making the state once again a primary actor in economic development. In May 2006, Morales followed through on his promise to nationalize natural gas: After sending in the army to seize Bolivian patrimony, Morales gave the oil and gas companies holding concessions six months to renegotiate the terms of their contracts. Previously, companies received on the order of 82 percent of profits, which left the Bolivian state with only a small portion. New taxes, royalties, and renegotiated contracts changed these proportions: now the central government receives about 54 percent of profits (after operating costs and funding the state-owned gas company) (Andean Information Network 2007). This has produced enormous revenues, much of which has been returned to the people in the form of state-welfare programs, including donations of tractors to peasant unions, a popular retirement account for senior citizens, a national subsidy to schoolchildren and their families, a national literacy program, and a zero-malnutrition program to eliminate childhood malnutrition (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2007). Second, and potentially more important, the MAS government implemented an experiment in direct democracy, a popularly elected constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution. In January 2009, Bolivians passed a national referendum approving the new constitution, which enacts fundamental changes in the form of the state; grants autonomies to indigenous nations; recognizes indigenous cultures, languages, and customs; and institutionalizes a far-reaching new land-reform program.

I suggest that these two stances—a push for social justice to overcome both colonialism and neoliberalism, on the one hand, and the embrace of

liberal political institutions (e.g., elections, constitutional conventions, direct public referenda) to do so, on the other hand—are the source of a profound tension in the Morales administration. Taking a close look at some of the conflicts that his administration has produced as it tries to balance these two frameworks may help us recognize some underlying tensions in both actually existing democracy and liberalism itself. I suggest that as Morales and his administration push this agenda forward, they not only are trying to move beyond neoliberalism but also may be working toward vernacularizing liberalism to make it more democratic and more relevant to Bolivia's indigenous populations.² So, instead of post-neoliberalism, perhaps these are efforts to transform liberalism through interactions with indigenous cultures and demands, with a goal to deepen democracy. Given the terrible crisis of neoliberal economics around the world, and the urgent need to rethink the relationship between capitalist accumulation and popular welfare, perhaps the Bolivian case can help us think about the possibilities and the dangers ahead.

A BRIEF BACKGROUND ON BOLIVIA

Understanding the contestation over neoliberalism, democracy, and social justice in Bolivia requires a brief description of the political and cultural context in which it is occurring. Bolivia is a country of about 9 million people, the overwhelming majority of whom identify themselves as indigenous. Nearly 62 percent of its people are native speakers of an indigenous language (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas de Bolivia/UMPA [INE] 2003; World Bank 2008). Although the meaning of the term *indigenous* is under debate, there is no doubt that it is a central category around which a large sector of Bolivians have organized and made political and cultural claims in the past decades (see Albro 2005; Canessa 2007). During the 1980s, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) espousing a global discourse of multiculturalism pushed ethnicity and difference as the basis of indigenous organizing. With the help of NGOs, foreign aid, the church, and anthropologists, indigenous peoples began to enter the national political scene in new ways, establishing national federations and making claims on collectively held territories on the basis of ethnic difference. In the 1990s, the neoliberal government folded the discourse of multiculturalism into its political project, giving these new indigenous citizens new rights, thus inviting them to participate in municipal development decisions and to adopt a neoliberal logic of responsibility and market-based rationality. As I have argued, there were some unexpected consequences: indigenous and poor people accepted

2. My use of the term *vernacularization* comes from Engle Merry's (1997, 2006) inspiring work on the vernacularization of human rights.

the interpellation as citizens, formed their own political parties, and now exercise substantial control over the MAS-controlled government (Postero 2007b).

The ascendance of formerly marginalized peasant and indigenous peoples to political power was not uncontested. Although those identifying themselves as indigenous are the majority in the country, there are wide regional divisions. The Andean highlands, including the capital La Paz and the Cochabamba Valley, has a large population of Aymara- and Quechua-speaking people. In the Oriente, the eastern lowlands, there is much less indigenous presence, and whites and mestizos hold political and economic power. The Media Luna area (the “half moon,” named for the shape of the four eastern departments of Santa Cruz, Chuquisaca, Beni, and Pando) is the main economic engine of the country, where the agribusiness elite cultivate soy, sunflowers, sorghum, and cattle for sale on the global market. This is also the area where Bolivia’s huge natural gas reserves are located.

The political leaders of the Media Luna firmly oppose Morales’s agenda to refound the nation and are even more firmly against his efforts to overturn neoliberalism, which they see as threatening their class interests. These elite leaders have articulated their interests through a political movement demanding regional autonomy mining long-term popular regional resentments against La Paz and racist fears (Gustafson 2006). Civic leaders mobilize large sectors of the lowland populations using a virulently racist counterdiscourse. This has resulted in an outpouring of violence, most of which has been visited on Andean people. In a shocking case in May 2008, supporters of the Civic Committee of Sucre subjected campesino militants of the MAS to humiliation and physical abuse in the streets of Sucre. A widely viewed YouTube video of the event shows armed civilians forcing MAS supporters to strip, then march to the central plaza, where they were insulted with racial epithets and their indigenous flag, or *wiphala*, was burned.³ Youth gangs in the lowland capital of Santa Cruz have harassed and attacked Andean migrants who support the MAS agenda of nationalization, students who organized against autonomy, and members of the landless movement (Dangl 2007). Although everyone admits that these violent reactions are abhorrent, defenders point out that, in most cases, the attackers felt themselves to be defending their communities against highlands invaders. These events and the confusing narratives of guilt and fear surrounding them highlight a growing sense of ethnic polarization and danger across the country. It is in this context that Morales and the MAS have been trying to enact their agenda of radical democracy.

3. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RXUkPrYHcE&eurl=http%3A%2F%2Fca-sa-del-duderino.blogspot.com%2F2009%2F05%2Fbbc-allegedly-reports-on-bolivia.html&feature=player_embedded.

TROUBLING TACTICS

Shortly after Morales's landslide victory in 2005, the country held elections for delegates for the constituent assembly that was to rewrite the country's constitution. The MAS delegates, most of whom were indigenous or from the popular sector, won 52 percent of seats. Because this did not give the MAS the two-thirds majority necessary to approve new articles under the terms of the Bolivian constitution or the special law convoking the assembly, everyone knew the proceedings would be contentious. The August 2006 inauguration of the constituent assembly in Sucre—where white, landowning men wrote the first Bolivian constitution in 1825—was a political spectacle, attended by delegations from all the country's indigenous groups and social movements. Many carried signs reading "¡Nunca Más Sin Nosotros!" ("Never Again without Us!"). Even the Guatemalan indigenous leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú attended. I was there and can attest to the incredible feeling of social revolution in the air.

In September 2006, shortly after the inauguration, however, MAS delegates voted by majority to change the rules of debate. In the controversial article 70, they declared the assembly to be *originaria* (original)—as opposed to *derivado*, or derived from the previous constitution—and authorized an absolute majority to approve all decisions except the final text, which would still require a two-thirds majority (*La Razón* 2006a).

The vote caused a political firestorm as people decried what seemed a blatant power grab. The right-wing Podemos Party leader, Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga, said, "The antidemocratic attitude of the MAS is leading to disaster [*fracaso*]" (*La Razón* 2006a). After months of political mudslinging, the Supreme Court ruled that, while the original constitution was still in force, the assembly was derived from it, and thus the *ley convocatoria* (the enabling legislation); as a result, the delegates to the assembly could not depart from this legal framework (*El Deber* 2006). However, MAS delegates maintained that the assembly was something new, derived from the power of the people. The MAS delegate Raúl Prada said, "By declaring itself *originaria*, the Asamblea Constituyente is [now] above all constituted power, including the constitution." As a result, he said, "this is not a constitutional convention, but a constituent assembly, an extraordinary political event that was born of social crisis" (*El Deber* 2006).

Here, I think, we can see what is at stake. For MAS's delegates, their election to the assembly and the election of Morales to the presidency was not just an election in the liberal sense of representation. Rather, for them it was a revolutionary intervention, not just to occupy the old structures of power but to fundamentally reshape them. They did not accept the liberal, and neoliberal, notion of the state as a neutral referee or watchman. Instead, they were attempting to call the bluff on this "misrecognition," to

change the very nature of the state (Bourdieu 1980). Yet Morales and his government were in a bind. They came to power through liberal institutions, and they lay claim to legitimacy at the international level because of that, declaring that theirs has been a peaceful and democratic revolution. Yet these reluctant liberals keep running up against the difficult fact that liberal democratic institutions as they existed could not accomplish the form of justice they felt Bolivia needed. The unanswered question remains, Did this justify their unilateral changing of the rules?

The assembly was paralyzed for months. Opposition groups held massive marches; boycotted the assembly; and in December 2006, organized a series of hunger strikes across the country. At one point, newspapers estimated that up to 1,200 people were on hunger strikes (*La Razón* 2006b). Finally, in February 2007, the MAS and the right-wing political parties reached a settlement in which each article would be approved by two-thirds of the commissions in charge of it and then by the entire body, and then would go to a public referendum for approval of the full text (unresolved articles pass to a committee to be settled or go to public vote in the referendum). With this compromise, the assembly ended its seven-month impasse and began its work on the content of the new constitution.

The tensions that began the assembly never diminished, however. Commissions assigned to tackle the difficult issues such as land reform, autonomy, and indigenous rights worked diligently but with great divisions. Many came up with compromise language for the text, but many submitted both majority and minority provisions. Near the end, stalemates over these issues threatened the viability of the whole process. Public protest in the streets of Sucre took a violent turn when MAS refused to allow Sucre delegates to put forth a claim that Sucre be named the capital, as it had been in the early days of the republic. The vice president, Álvaro García Linera, convened a dialogue with the opposition parties but made little progress. Delegates from the right began to boycott the assembly's commissions and meetings, and the MAS delegates faced dangerous street violence in Sucre. Finally, Morales and the MAS made a political decision not to let the process run aground. They bused many of the delegates—but not those from opposition parties—to the nearby city of Oruro and, in a highly controversial special session, passed a version of the constitution by a two-thirds vote of those attending.

That text still needed to go before the Bolivian people, which required the legislature to pass a bill scheduling the referendum. That proved difficult, as MAS did not control Congress, so for several months the fate of the new constitution was left hanging. Meanwhile, in Santa Cruz, in September 2008, a regional coup began. Autonomy activists took control of state buildings, burning several down, and the new prefect (governor) declared that the department was an autonomous entity with its own laws and leaders. A mass of highland indigenous supporters of the MAS

headed for Santa Cruz, and many believed a showdown was inevitable (*El Deber* 2008b; Romero 2008a, 2008b). Then, in the northern department of Pando, a group of eleven indigenous MAS supporters were brutally massacred under the leadership of the prefect-governor (Naciones Unidas, Oficina del Alto Comisionado para los Derechos Humanos, Bolivia 2009). The shock of this event turned the tide of public opinion and led to negotiations between the state and the autonomy movement leaders. In a few weeks, they had come up with a negotiated constitution, which all parties agreed to put to public vote. The MAS Party made substantial concessions on land reform, grandfathering in existing large landholdings and limiting Morales's ability to hold office indefinitely. In exchange, departments won limited autonomy and the ability to administer their own revenues. The referendum took place on January 25, 2009, and the constitution passed by a 60 percent margin.

I discuss the content of the new constitution in a later section, but here I address the process by which it was passed, which was troubling on several grounds. Many Bolivians expressed serious concern about the seemingly antidemocratic way that the constituent assembly was run; the attempted power grab over the two-thirds rule; and most seriously, the way the MAS passed the constitution in Oruro. As a result, for many, this text was tainted. Then, the fact that Morales and his followers could barter the terms of the constitution, agonizingly negotiated by assembly delegates, in a political compromise seemed to make a mockery of all the claims to direct democracy. Often, people voice these concerns in terms of the fear of an authoritarian or populist form of government (a popular banner in Santa Cruz demonstrations declared, "Evo Asesino de Democracia," or "Evo, Assassin of Democracy"). Here are echoes of the debates about Venezuela's president, Hugo Chávez. Many white and mestizo Bolivians have characterized these actions in more ethnic terms, arguing that this was a racial takeover, motivated by revenge or reverse racism. So, did this overt power grab challenge established notions of liberal democracy? If so, a challenge for whom? Clearly, these were not the concerns of the majority of *masistas*, who considered the events absolutely appropriate acts challenging the long-entrenched power of the white and mestizo elite. Or was this just down-and-dirty politicking by parties with a lot at stake? What do these tensions reveal about the possibility of balancing indigenous interests in social justice and liberal democratic notions of due process?

There clearly is a lot at stake: Morales and his government are attempting to transform the relationships among state, market, and society. Market processes are surrounded by and enacted in a web of social and political relationships, which act both to restrain and to produce economic and industrial development. Orthodox neoliberal theorists push to disembed capital from all such constraints, arguing that capital must be allowed unfettered access and mobility (Harvey 2005). Many critical of the caustic

effects of neoliberalism have argued that this narrow version of liberalism obscures social relations; excludes concerns about welfare, redistribution, and equity; and ultimately fails to offer a satisfying resolution of the antagonisms at the heart of contemporary society (Brown 2003; Lazar 2004). This is precisely the position of Morales and the MAS. Their goal for this radical anti-neoliberal democracy is to reembed the economy and market processes in social and cultural webs in such a way as to move toward greater equality. So, is this worthy goal sufficient justification for bending or violating the rule of law? I must be clear that I am not romanticizing or excusing this government. Part of the reason I began to think about this issue is that I found myself in agreement with the MAS's overall agenda but quite critical of the process by which it was trying to accomplish it. I began to wonder whether that focus on the imperfect process was obscuring a deeper analysis.

THE COSMOPOLITANISM DEBATES

To help me think about these questions, I have found some interesting tools in debates around the idea of cosmopolitanism. Because cosmopolitanism has no agreed-on definition, it appears to me to be one of those ideas that is "good to think with" (Levi-Strauss 1962). There are several ways people use the term *cosmopolitanism*. Some refer to a sociocultural condition brought on by the interpenetrations of globalization (Vertovec and Cohen 2002). Others use it to refer to a philosophy or worldview of people who urge that, instead of grounding ourselves in specific groups or contexts, we live in a world governed by overarching principles of rights and justice (Vertovec and Cohen 2002). This call to be citizens of the world reflects the well-known argument of Nussbaum (1996), who called for people to leave patriotism, in essence, national or local allegiances, to cleave to wider allegiances to global humanity.

There are other takes on the term *cosmopolitanism*, but what I find most helpful in the discussion about cosmopolitanism is the concern with the tension between liberalism and cultural difference or particularism. The work of Appiah (1997, 2006) is particularly useful. Appiah argues for what he calls "liberal cosmopolitanism." By that, he means, responding to Nussbaum, that one can be both a cosmopolitan, celebrating that there are different local ways of being human, and a patriot, participating in and respecting the political institutions of a particular society. He lauds the possibilities and choices that global culture provides: "the cosmopolitan ideal—take your roots with you—is one in which people are free to choose the local forms of human life within which they will live" (Appiah 1997, 622). This is possible, however, only if cosmopolitanism is enacted in a liberal democratic framework, with political institutions to protect people's ability to hold their own culturally constructed notions of the

common good and to allow the right to exist, thus protecting individual human rights. Notions of the common good can differ widely, as long as there is a common political culture, by which Appiah refers to a shared commitment to the organization of the state and the rule of law.

I present Appiah's argument because it is a clear articulation of a progressive liberal multiculturalism with which many readers might identify, as it recognizes difference in a liberal framework of rights and laws. In fact, cosmopolitanism is, as Craig Calhoun (2002, 93) suggests, "the latest effort to revitalize liberalism." More important, it reflects the perspective I have heard in Bolivia from critics of the MAS. For instance, most center-left Bolivian intellectuals I know hold some version of this view. Most of them lived through years of military dictatorship and an agonizing process of winning back democracy. They hoped to construct a Bolivia in which indigenous and mestizo peoples could peacefully coexist and enjoy the rights and benefits that enlightened members of the global community around them enjoyed. For them, the MAS government's undemocratic behavior is a bitter betrayal of the multicultural justice for which they have been fighting for so many years. They perceive it as a form of particularism verging on fundamentalism, and they fear that this communal value system will sweep away the democratic gains Bolivia has made over the past two decades. I understand and sympathize with their position, but I think a critical look at the assumptions underlying the notion of liberal cosmopolitanism may illustrate some of the limitations of this liberal argument. I focus here on three different but related critiques. None of them is original—all rehearse tried-and-true arguments against liberalism, but they do point to a better understanding of the fundamental tensions at play in the Bolivian case.

THE NEED FOR "COSMOPOLITICS"

I begin with the most common critique of liberalism: it can be an empty formalism concerned with legal procedures over substance or justice. The basis of this critique is that laws that appear to uphold the rights of all citizens may in fact obscure—or worse, reinforce—underlying inequalities. This became clear to me in my work on the 1990s neoliberal political reforms in Bolivia. Although the Law of Popular Participation appeared to invite all citizens including indigenous groups to participate in local government decision making, in practice, it continued to reinforce the power and knowledge of the local elite. Political parties continued to control the local city councils, and whites and mestizos continued to control the political parties, until social movements organized the MAS. As a result, few indigenous people were able to take advantage of the citizenship rights the reforms promised to extend them. To gain those universal rights in practice required substantial struggle. This demonstrates an important

fact: citizenship is *not* a neutral legal status inhabited by prepolitical subjects. Rather, it is a contested process involving actors whose subject positions not only are culturally and politically constructed but also are constructed in relation to the political process itself. Who gets to be a citizen turns out to be both a procedural and a substantive question. So, if cosmopolitans are citizens of the world (*cosmo-polis*), we should expect the same understandings to apply. This suggests that rather than worrying only about the specifics of process, we should instead consider what Archibugi (2000) calls “cosmopolitics”—the power relations inherent in “actually existing cosmopolitanism” (Calhoun 2002).

Appiah’s (1997) description of the cosmopolitan ideal seems to ignore such power structures, assuming a world filled with actors with unlimited agency to choose among endless options protected by a benevolent neutral state. But this is not what my work in Bolivia has shown me. Many Bolivians still struggle against the terrible inequalities that foreclose their choices, most salient of which is overarching racism. Global capitalism has not been kind to most Bolivians, especially under the past two decades of neoliberal restructuring. Rather than opening up opportunities, the effects of neoliberal reforms have foreclosed options, thus forcing many rural people to give up their traditional farms to become part of the urban poor. Moreover, the notion of a neutral state out there protecting individual choices with neutral democratic institutions just doesn’t ring true for poor and indigenous Bolivians. They have had a very different experience with the Bolivian state, which the elite controlled since the founding of the republic and often has been riddled with corruption. Excluded from political participation, poor and indigenous people watched from the sidelines as elites used political parties and positions in government to enrich themselves and their friends. However, their determination to control the Constituent Assembly and to dictate the terms of the new constitution was motivated not by a cavalier attitude toward the law but by a desire to change the law to make meaningful citizenship possible in the current contexts. Thus, although many opponents of the MAS strategies accuse them of being undemocratic or nonliberal in terms of process, this critique might enable another view of them: as profoundly liberal, making use of liberal institutions to enact a substantive new state model that can more effectively engage its citizens and provide for their welfare.

This focus on the power relations underlying liberal democratic processes also makes clear that efforts to transform the state and the economy are in fact efforts to make possible the cosmopolitan dream of expanded choices. Here we see the relationship between democracy and development. As Philip Oxhorn and I discuss in the Introduction to this special issue of *Latin American Research Review*, the political scientist Guillermo O’Donnell (2004) argues that democracy and development have very sim-

ilar goals. Building on the work of the economist Amartya Sen, O'Donnell argues that both democracy and development are based on the idea of an agentive human being with rights and capabilities. Attaining these rights and capabilities, what we might call human development, does not occur simply through increased access to material resources but rather as a result of political and often conflictive processes. Democracy, he concludes, is the "enabling milieu" for these struggles for development and dignity (O'Donnell 2004, 11). Taking this perspective, we can see the efforts of the MAS government as deeply inscribed in the liberal projects of both development and democracy. By exercising their political rights—through representative democratic institutions and through civil society demonstrations—Bolivia's formerly marginalized peoples are making claims to economic and social rights as well.

EXPANDING UNIVERSALISM

The second critique is one well known to anthropologists: the liberal cosmopolitanism that Appiah (1997) proposes is based on a Western hegemonic notion of the universal. Butler (1996) has written compellingly about this, suggesting not only that the universal is a contested term subject to cultural variability but also that the scope of what different peoples consider universal is only partly articulated and under ongoing redefinition. It is, she suggests, an "open-ended ideal that has not been adequately encoded by any given set of legal conventions" (Butler 1996, 48). The term *universal* can, of course, apply to different spheres. First, it can refer to rights that all people should enjoy simply by virtue of being human. This is the sense that the most iconic liberal document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948), employs: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (article 1). A more specific sense of the term might be that of the particular set of rights shared universally by all members of a polity, such as a nation-state. This gets us back to the contested nature of citizenship and the need to recognize that what is going on in Bolivia is a political struggle in which a widely expanded range of Bolivians are developing new notions of what rights should be considered universal for all Bolivian citizens. For hundreds of years, Indians were not considered legitimate bearers of either sort of universal right because they were not considered fully human, rational persons and/or because they did not meet the requirements to be fully participating citizens (Egan 2006; Postero 2007b). The Constituent Assembly and the new constitution are the means by which Bolivians decided on what they now consider universal citizenship rights.

This brings us to the contents of the new constitution. As I read this amazing new document, which is truly utopian, I am struck again by the efforts the authors made to balance cultural and economic justice, on the

one hand, and rights-based notions of equality, on the other hand—the old tensions underlying liberalism.

The Preamble gives an idea of the overarching goals of the text:

The Bolivian public, which is plural in composition, From the depths of history, inspired by the struggles of the past: the anti-colonial indigenous uprisings, independence, the popular liberation struggles, the indigenous, social, and syndical marches, the water war and the October war, the struggles for land and territory, and in the memory of our martyrs, constructs a new State.

A State based in respect and equality among all, with the principles of sovereignty, dignity, complementarity, solidarity, harmony, and equality in the distribution and redistribution of social product, where the search for a good life [*vivir bien*] predominates, with respect for the economic, social, juridical, and cultural plurality of the inhabitants of this land, living together collectively with access to water, work, education, health, and housing for all. (República de Bolivia 2008)

Here we can already see what the authors of this text believe should be universal rights for all Bolivians—and they include things we might characterize as positive rights—those social and economic rights that the UNDR recognized but that don't appear in the U.S. Constitution, for instance, which focuses instead on negative rights. In past engagements with liberal institutions, all citizens, including those identified as indigenous, gained those negative rights such as freedom to contract and so on. But this has not proved enough. They also want positive rights—the social and economic rights they assumed would accompany their status as citizens. And why shouldn't they assume this? These positive rights had always accrued to the elite through the guise of meritocracy and free market. So Morales and the MAS are attempting to use the state to enact a politics of redistribution (Fraser 1997), forging what might be referred to as a post-neoliberal national economic strategy.

But this new constitution also makes explicit claims about indigenous peoples' rights and values. Article 1 describes Bolivia as a plurinational communitarian state (*estado unitario social de derecho plurinacional comunitario*). Article 2 recognizes the precolonial existence of "indigenous original [*originario*] peasant peoples and nations" and guarantees their rights to autonomy, self-government, culture, recognition, and territories.⁴ Later sections go on to elucidate what autonomy means for indigenous peoples, as well as for other entities like regional governments and municipalities.

Perhaps most interesting is the tension between articles 4 and 8. Article 4 guarantees "liberty of religion and spiritual beliefs, in accordance with *cosmovisiones* [literally, worldviews]" and declares the state independent of all religion. But article 8 contains this statement:

4. This category is nowhere defined, unproblematically eliding decades of debates on the ground and in academic circles about relations among race, ethnicity, and class.

The State assumes and promotes as ethical-moral principles of the plural society: *ama qhilla, ama llulla, ama suwa* (*no seas flojo, no seas mentiroso ni seas ladrón*) [this is an Aymara moral code, do not be lazy, do not lie, do not steal]; *suma qamaña* (*vivir bien*) [an Aymara ideal of the good life], *ñandereko* (*vida armoniosa*) [a Guaraní ideal of harmonious life]; *teko kavi* [a Guaraní admonition to live well and wisely]; *ivi marei* (*tierra sin mal*) [a Guaraní idealized notion of the land without evil]; and *qhapaj ñan* (*camino o vida noble*) [a Quechua call to follow the noble path].

Here we see the authors of this new constitution enshrining particular indigenous cultural values as the fundamental ethical basis for the state. That raises all kinds of questions. First, are the authors implying that all native peoples share similar cultural norms? Isn't this a form of essentializing what are actually complex and ever-changing ethnic formations? Second, how are they planning to enact this state-sponsored morality? Is this merely symbolic or rhetorical, or will the new plurinational assembly dictate particular practices to implement it? Finally, returning to the questions of liberalism, how can this be a legitimate liberal constitution if it privileges one cultural framework over all others? Isn't this exactly what the cosmopolitan advocates—and the MAS critics—were worried about avoiding? Doesn't this conflict with freedom of religion? In contrast, isn't this exactly what the U.S. Declaration of Independence promotes: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Of course, these so-called universal values were also grounded in a particular cultural framework. Can we see the Bolivian article as yet another vernacular or local version of these universal notions?

OVERCOMING DUALISMS

This brings me to the final critique, which combines the first two, I think. Appiah's (1997) ideal formulation is based on a republican notion of citizens, who hold their own culturally infused values in private but who bracket them when considering the public good. This definition of public and private spheres is the essence of liberal philosophy, which holds that society works best and individuals are most fulfilled when the state stays out of their private lives and allows them the freedom to make contracts in an unencumbered market. I think this is precisely the point at which Bolivia's new government is offering the most striking challenges to liberalism. Morales and the MAS are explicitly *not* continuing this bracketing.

But what if the notion of common good they come up with is based in specific cultural values that are not shared by all? Is this a sort of Andean fundamentalism? This is what both Appiah (2006) and Sen (2006) have argued is the liberal limit to cosmopolitanism—where fundamentalist values of any sort restrict the freedoms of some. I understand their concern, but I am convinced that this framing just falls back on the old

liberal dualities: private and public, good universal values and bad local values, authoritarian and democratic, cosmopolitan and communitarian. This just leads us around and around in an unhelpful logical circle with no end.

So, here again, I think the Bolivian case helps us break down that duality. Feminism taught us long ago that the lines delineating private and public are untrustworthy and tend to maintain the privileges of those who drew the lines in the first place. It is precisely to this that the messy actions of the unruly MAS members are drawing attention: the good universal values were never shaped by them to begin with; that is, they weren't ever universal. But beyond being suspicious of the motive and privilege of those who label others' ideas as fundamentalist, I think we also need to consider the dialectics of the categories themselves. Andean people are not a static category with unmoving values.⁵ What it means to be indigenous today in Bolivia emerged from indigenous peoples' engagements with liberal notions of human rights, with transnational NGOs, and with the international discourses of indigenism. When these complexly interpellated people engage these liberal institutions, they bring to them new valences from their own communal experiences and values, which again shape the processes of electoral politics. Similarly, democratic political processes after the end of the dictatorships facilitated these engagements, which now act to expand notions of what democracy might entail. Thus, not only do indigenous identities and values undergo continuous change in relation to liberalism; so do Bolivian identities and values. The point, I think, is not to see ethnic particularism or social justice efforts as opposed to liberalism or democracy but to understand how these categories continue to co-constitute each other precisely through tensions like the ones I describe here. Thus, the actions, values, and interests of Morales and the MAS are *already* the outcome of the ongoing tensions between liberalism and local ethnic particularisms. In their efforts to build a new state in a contested post-neoliberal context, I suggest, these indigenous political actors are developing a new and vernacular version of liberalism, which they hope can lead them and all Bolivians toward radical democracy.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have tried to analyze the unresolved tensions and exclusions in contemporary Bolivian liberal democracy. The structured inequalities at the heart of Bolivian society—particularly those of race

5. In this post-multicultural period, there is a tendency on all sides to stereotype Andean culture. For an examination of the ways the MAS has used idealized versions of Andean culture to further its political ends, see Postero 2007b).

and class—that were the legacy of the colonial period remained in place through the republic, when liberals instituted the first constitution. In that implementation of liberalism, indigenous people remained excluded from its universal promises. The 1952 revolution made some inroads into these inequalities, extending suffrage to all, including indigenous people, and breaking up many large landholdings through a massive land reform. Yet ongoing racial privileges and political structures precluded full participation and equality of opportunity. Neoliberal multiculturalism confronted these issues with a new logic and set of practices, with spectacular failures and surprising results. I view the ongoing experiment in Bolivia as the latest attempt to make liberalism overcome its limitations, by deepening the promise of democratic participation. A central contribution of the MAS government, then, is a new set of practices—similar to those Arditti (2008) calls “post-liberal” (this is a quote, so we can’t change it)—which expand and challenge previous definitions of democracy.

I have commented at some length about the troubling aspects of this government’s strategies. I continue to be concerned about the events I described here and even more so about the allegations of human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, and political prosecutions circulating in the Bolivian press.⁶ Thus, my goal here has been not to excuse or justify Morales or the MAS government but to show how the events appear to be the results of historical and ongoing contradictions that liberal processes cannot ever entirely overcome. Democracy is messy, and even when liberal democratic institutions are expanded and transformed to meet contemporary needs, this messiness does not go away. So, it seems that Bolivia’s actually existing democracy will bear the burden of these legacies. This means that we will probably continue to see violence, politicking, and power grabbing on all sides. It is discouraging to think that democracy—especially democracy led by those excluded from its promises for so long—has not proved the hoped-for magic wand for social justice. Yet it is worth lauding the successes of this experiment as well: the inclusions of an entire segment of the Bolivian population into political life, the expansion of political rights into dimensions of culture previously thought of as private, and a renewed vision of the relationship between liberty and welfare. If every other attempt at liberal democracy so far has had its successes and failures, perhaps we can expect no more from this one.

6. During 2009 and 2010 trips to Bolivia, I found widespread public dismay at the arbitrariness of the justice system, at the impunity given the increasing incidents of communal justice such as lynchings of criminals, and at the secrecy of the MAS government. The most horrifying case involves the government “execution” in a Santa Cruz hotel room of three foreign men who were supposedly involved in a conspiracy to kill President Morales (*El Deber* 2009).

REFERENCES

- Albro, Robert
2005 "Indigenous in the Plural in Bolivian Oppositional Politics." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 24 (4): 433–453.
- Alvarez, Sonia, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar
1998 *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Andean Information Network
2007 "Bolivia's Gas Nationalization: Opportunity and Challenges (1)" (accessed November 21, 2007, at http://ain-bolivia.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=106&Itemid=29).
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony
1997 "Cosmopolitan Patriots." *Critical Inquiry* 23 (Spring 1997): 617–639.
2006 "The Case for Contamination." *New York Times Magazine*, January 1, 2006, 30–37, 52.
- Archibugi, Danielle
2000 "Cosmopolitan Democracy." *New Left Review* 4 (July–August): 137–150.
- Arditti, Benjamin
2008 "Arguments about the Left Turns in Latin America: A Post-Liberal Politics?" *Latin American Research Review* 43 (3): 59–81.
- Arze, Carlos, and Tom Kruse
2004 "The Consequences of Neoliberal Reform." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 38 (3): 23–28.
- Bourdieu, Pierre
1980 *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Brown, Wendy
2003 "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy." *Theory and Event* 7 (1): 1–21.
- Butler, Judith
1996 "Universality in Culture." In *In For Love of Country, Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, by Martha C. Nussbaum, edited by Joshua Cohen, 45–52. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Calhoun, Craig
2002 "The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travellers: Towards a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism." In *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice*, edited by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, 86–109. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Canessa, Andrew
2007 "Who Is Indigenous? Self-Identification, Indigeneity, and Claims to Justice in Contemporary Bolivia." *Urban Anthropology* 36 (3): 195–237.
- Dagnino, Evelina
2003 "Citizenship in Latin America: An Introduction." *Latin American Perspectives* 30 (2): 3.
- Dangl, Benjamin
2007 "The Dark Side of Bolivia's Half Moon" (accessed June 9, 2009, at <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/content/view/603/1/>).
- Egan, Nancy
2006 "*Una lucha de razas, secular y honda*": *The Proceso Mohoza, Bolivia 1899–1905*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of California, San Diego.
- El Deber* (Santa Cruz, Bolivia)
2009 *Informe húngaro indica que Magyarosi se ahogó en sangre*. October 11.
2008a "Évo propone a indígenas 'erradicar' el capitalismo." April 21.
2008b "El ejecutivo no dictará el estado de excepción." September 10.
2006 "Suprema: Asamblea es derivada y debe aprobarse por dos tercios." October 4.
- Engle Merry, Sally
1997 "Legal Pluralism and Transnational Culture: The Ka Ho'okolokolonui Kanaka Maoli tribunal, Hawai'i." In *Human Rights, Culture and Context, Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Richard Wilson. London: Pluto Press.
2006 *Human Rights and Gender Violence, Translating International Law into Local Justice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Fraser, Nancy
1997 *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*. London: Routledge.
- Gustafson, Bret
2006 "Spectacles of Autonomy and Crisis; or, What Bulls and Beauty Queens Have to Do with Regionalism in Eastern Bolivia." *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 11 (2): 351–380.
- Hart, Gillian
2002a "Development beyond Neoliberalism: Power, Culture, and Political Economy." *Progress in Human Geography* 26: 812–822.
2002b *Disabling Globalization: Places of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
2010 "D/developments after the Meltdown." *Antipode* 41: 117–141.
- Harvey, David
2005 *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hylton, Forrest, and Sinclair Thomson
2007 *Revolutionary Horizons, Past and Present in Bolivian Politics*. London: Verso.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas de Bolivia/UMPA
2003 *Bolivia: Características sociodemográficas de la población*. La Paz: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas de Bolivia.
- Kohl, Ben, and Linda Farthing
2006 *Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Hegemony and Social Resistance*. London: Zed Books.
- La Razón (La Paz)
2006a "El MAS y la oposición pelean hasta poner en riesgo la Asamblea." September 4.
2006b "Día a día crece la huelga por los dos tercios de voto." December 7.
- Lazar, Sian
2004 "El Alto, Ciudad Rebelde: Organizations Bases for Revolt." Unpublished Paper for Society for Latin American Studies meeting, Leiden, Holland, April 2–4.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude.
1962 *Le totémisme aujourd'hui*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Morales, Evo
2003 "Entrevista para Punto Final" (accessed January 2004 at <http://www.masbolivia.org/articulos/entrevistaevo.htm>).
- Naciones Unidas Derechos Humanos
2009 *Informe público de la Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Bolivia sobre los hechos de violencia ocurridos en Pando en septiembre de 2008*. La Paz: Naciones Unidas, Oficina del Alto Comisionado para los Derechos Humanos, Bolivia.
- Nussbaum, Martha
1996 "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." In *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, Martha C. Nussbaum and Respondents, edited by Joshua Cohen, 3–20. Boston: Beacon Press.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo
2004 "Human Development, Human Rights, and Democracy." In *The Quality of Democracy: Theory and Applications*, edited by G. O'Donnell, J. Vargas Cullell, and O. M. Iazzetta, 9–92. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Peck, Jamie, and Adam Tickell
2002 "Neoliberalizing Space." *Antipode* 34 (3): 380–404.
- Postero, Nancy
2007a "Andean Utopias in Evo Morales's Bolivia." *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 2 (1): 1–28.
2007b *Now We Are Citizens, Indigenous Politics in Postmulticultural Bolivia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Postero, Nancy, and Leon Zamosc
2004 "Indigenous Movements and the Indian Question in Latin America." In *The Struggle for Indian Rights in Latin America*, edited by Nancy Postero and Leon Zamosc, 1–31. London: Sussex Academic Press.

República de Bolivia

2008 *Nueva Constitución Política del Estado, Texto Final Compatibilizado*. La Paz: República de Bolivia.

Romero, Simon

2008a "A Crisis Highlights Divisions in Bolivia." *New York Times*, September 15.

2008b "Fears of Turmoil Persist as Powerful President Reshapes Bitterly Divided Bolivia." *New York Times*, September 28.

Sen, Amartya

2006 *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Speed, Shannon

2008 *Rights in Rebellion: Indigenous Struggle and Human Rights in Chiapas*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

United Nations

1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. New York: UN Department of Public Information.

Vertovec, Steven, and Robin Cohen

2002 "Introduction: Conceiving Cosmopolitanism." In *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism, Theory, Context, and Practice*, edited by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, 1–22. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Weisbrot, Mark, and Luis Sandoval

2007 "Bolivia's Economy: An Update." Washington, D.C.: Center for Economic Policy Research Issue Brief (accessed September 16, 2008, at <http://www.cepr.net/index.php/publications/reports/bolivia-s-economy-an-update>).

World Bank

2008 "Bolivian Highlights" (accessed March 2, 2009, at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/0,,contentMDK:20505835~isCUR L:Y~menuPK:258569~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:258554,00.html>).